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"THE YOUNG LADY MUST REMAIN HERE UNTIL THINGS ARE A BIT SETTLED," SAID MR. MUNDEN, STARTING TO GO UPSTAIRS.

**THE HEAT AND BURDEN  
OF THE DAY.**

**[A NOVELETTE.]**

**CHAPTER I.**

"My dear," said Mrs. Stacey, as she and her husband sat at dinner, "they have arrived, and I do hope they will prove nice, as Woodhurst is quite opposite. I saw them come—oh, such a number of them! Browne brought some of them up in his waggonette, the others followed in a cab. I was in my dressing-room, and was curious—"

"So stayed to see the last consignment!" laughed Mr. Stacey, his jolly face beaming across the table at the wife of thirty years. "Tell me all about them, Lottie, I know you are dying to do so; and I hope, for your sake, they will prove nice. Forsyth has a good name in the City."

"He is rather good-looking, too," answered Mrs. Stacey; and, I should say, not more than

forty-five; his wife is younger. I can't say I like her appearance much. There are ten children—"

"No more? Forgive the interruption, Lottie, I am waiting hungrily for news."

"Rather you are laughing at me; but I forgive you, knowing that levity is your besetting sin. Well, they have but two servants and a governess. I guess she is the governess, for she isn't as well dressed as the children, and there is too much difference in their respective ages to suppose her sister to the young tribe, neither is Mrs. Forsyth old enough to be her mother. I liked her best of any. She is rather tall and slender, with fair brown hair and a pretty face—that is if the distance did not deceive me. But I shall soon be able to tell you all about them, because when they are settled I shall call; and, if Mrs. Forsyth proves agreeable, I shall ask some of the babies over here. They are almost all fair-haired, and I should imagine the eldest is not more than twelve."

"A very nice handful, indeed, for a man not overburdened with riches," said Mr. Stacey; "and now, if we have finished our discussion upon the new people, we will start for the City,

or we shall miss the play, which this week is especially good."

"I have only to get my cloak," responded Mrs. Stacey, and five minutes later they had left Pondleigh Station en route for Liverpool.

Mr. Stacey was a wealthy merchant of that city, but lived at Pondleigh, a little village just beyond, where he had built himself a handsome house, and other men of substance following his example, Pondleigh bade fair to become quite a fashionable suburb.

On the opposite of the road, of which Glencairn (Mr. Stacey's house) commanded a good view, was Woodhurst, recently leased by Mr. Forsyth. The house itself was not visible, being surrounded by a high brick wall, and shaded by huge chest-nuts.

Once inside the gates one saw how very pretty the place was; a beautiful lawn, surrounded by flower-beds and a trim gravel path, made a good fore-ground to a long double-fronted house of two stories.

The entrance was through a rustic porch, covered with clematis and Virginia creeper; the hall, which was very spacious, ran quite through to the greenhouse; on one side of it was the

drawing-room, on the other, the reception rooms and the wide staircase. Beyond the greenhouse was another lawn, of larger dimensions than the front, surrounded by yews and elms, which, in their turn, were flanked by stable and coach-house; then a little wicket-gate led through to the kitchen-garden which was very extensive.

But, in spite of all these advantages, Woodhurst was a cheap house, and, with his large family, Mr. Forsyth was compelled to study ways and means; careful calculation had shown him that it would cost less to live at Pondleigh than in Liverpool, even though the removal would necessitate for him a daily journey to and from the city by rail.

In a very little while the Forsyths had shaken themselves down into their new house, and Mrs. Stacey thought the time had arrived to pay her first visit.

She was quite the great lady of Pondleigh, although no one could be less pretentious or affected than she, and secretly Mrs. Forsyth was delighted when her card was carried in, although she met her visitor with an easy grace of manner and a pleasant cordiality which would have impressed Mrs. Stacey favourably but for what followed. Naturally the latter referred to the number of children she saw going in and out.

Mrs. Forsyth spread out her hands deprecatingly saying, with a little laugh:

"Is it not dreadful? I am only thirty-four and I have ten—"

"I have none," answered the other with a faint sigh. "Blessings are very unequally divided; really, Mrs. Forsyth, you are an enviable woman."

"Most people do not consider me so; but (and the mother-love shone in her rather pale blue eyes) I would not part with one of them. Of course, with so many to provide for, we are quite poor people, and, naturally, I have a heap of anxieties; but I think myself more fortunate than the majority of my friends: my children love me, and my husband adores me."

She was almost pretty when animated; her eyes darkened, and her cheeks took a faint pink tinge.

Mrs. Stacey's heart warmed to her as she said,—

"I am quite sure you deserve both the love and adoration."

"Oh, thank you so much! indeed you are very kind to say so, and you invite my confidence. If it were not for the future, I should be perfectly happy. But it is like this, every year the children grow more expensive, and I feel afraid at times lest our means will not meet their requirements. Then, again, William, that is my husband, is so much my senior—I am his second wife; but there, I am boring you, which is the last thing I intended doing. Would you like to see the four eldest children?—they are in the schoolroom; the other six are too young to receive any instruction save from nurse."

She rang the bell, and a neat maid appearing, said, "Tell Miss Una to excuse the children a short time; let them come down at once."

Miss Una! that was the governess, Mrs. Stacey supposed; what a pity she would not come down too, for the girl's face had attracted her; and whilst she thought thus, the children entered.

They were pretty, the two girls fair and petite, the boys dark and robust; Mrs. Stacey was delighted with them, and instantly invited them over to Glencairn to tea "on the first holiday governess would give them."

"Governess," echoed the eldest girl, opening her eyes wide, "we have no governess; sister Una teaches us; she is ever so much older than we are."

Turning quickly for confirmation to Mrs. Forsyth, the lady saw her brow contract and her eyes flash; but in a moment she had recovered her former manner and with a smile said, "Oh, did I not tell you Mr. Forsyth's daughter by his first wife is with us. She is called Una, and is eighteen; being clever she undertakes the training of my babies' intellects—"

"I should like to know her," said Mrs. Stacey with a sudden feeling that her hostess was not quite so kind as she might have been to her step-daughter, "she has not only a pretty but a good face,"

"Mabel, tell Una to come down," remarked Mrs. Forsyth, just a shade coldly, and presently a young girl entered.

She was very pretty indeed—far prettier than Mrs. Stacey had at first believed; her small, proudly poised head was crowned with a mass of yellow-brown plaits; her eyes were dark violet; her features regular and the mouth sweet.

But the visitor could not fail to notice her dress was worn even to shabbiness, although it was so scrupulously neat, the white collar and cuffs so spotless.

Her heart grew very tender towards this motherless girl, who responded so shyly to her greeting, and taking her face between her hands to the astonishment both of Mrs. Forsyth and Una, she kissed her.

"My dear, I am so glad to learn you are Mrs. Forsyth's daughter, because I am sure she will often spare you to a lonely old woman. You see," turning with a smile to her hostess, "at Glencairn we have no young folks; sometimes Roy Lancaster, my nephew, is with us, but he is studying law at the Temple, and naturally we do not see him often. When can you spare Una to us—we are quiet folk and it is rather dull at Glencairn, but I can promise her a very hearty welcome."

Mrs. Forsyth hesitated; she did not like to offend this influential neighbour who had it in her power to help them so much, and seemed so disposed to make their interests hers; and then she said with just the slightest infusion of coldness in her voice,—

"It shall be when you like, Mrs. Stacey; I dare say we can arrange about the lessons—"

"Oh, I won't interfere with the little ones' studies, or your routine. If Miss Una will dine with us quite *en famille* to-day at six, I shall be delighted. Don't trouble to dress—I never do when Dick and I are alone."

Shortly after she took her leave, Una and her charges returning to the school-room, whilst Mabel, who was so quick to notice and comment upon all that passed until she had earned for herself the name of "The Infant Terrible," said decidedly,—

"I like Mrs. Stacey, and she is fond of you already, Una; I am so glad, because mamma isn't so kind to you as to us; I suppose she would be if she were your very own mamma. I do hope you will enjoy yourself."

"Thank you, Mabel; and now we will return to lessons, but you must try to remember it is not kind or dutiful to speak of mamma as you did."

"It is the truth," said the irrepressible, "and everybody that knows us knows that too. There, I will be good, Una, I don't want to vex you, dear."

Often Una thought she could not have endured her uncongenial life and sad surroundings but for the children, who idolised her, which was well, as they obeyed her through love, and authority in the house she had none.

The little ones were spoiled and wilful, and although Mrs. Forsyth expected her step-daughter to control them she would not have upheld her in any attempt to do so; even the servants knew they might set Miss Una at defiance, and like the generality of their class made the utmost use of that knowledge.

Her father's heart had been completely weaned from her by his wife and her little ones—and, she loved him so dearly, this gay, good-humoured man, who in the old, old days (so far away that they seemed at times unreal) had laughed and romped with her, had sympathised with her childish troubles, and grieved over her griefs.

It was a hard life she led; from early morning until night she worked like the veriest slave. It was Una who prepared the children's breakfasts, Una who taught them, mended and made for them, doing in one hour more than Mrs. Forsyth did in three, because the latter was slower and less capable, and it was Una who made the dainty dishes for occasional guests, although she received no credit for her labour, and rarely appeared at any entertainment.

Sometimes when things went very wrong she would think, "when I am twenty-one I will go away"; for then she would come into her little

fortune of five hundred pounds—her mother's legacy—but what she would do, where she would go, she did not stay to think.

## CHAPTER II.

PRECISELY at six Una went over to Glencairn, wearing her best gown, an inexpensive but pretty delaine, and Mrs. Stacey welcomed her with motherly warmth, carrying her off triumphantly to meet the lord and master of the house. He was not at all a formidable personage, being short and stout, with a jolly round face and humorous grey eyes.

"So you have taken compassion on us, Miss Forsyth," he said, shaking hands. "That is very good, for Mrs. Stacey and I quarrel horribly when alone, and a change is sometimes pleasant. See how she is frowning at me now."

"You are too bad, Dick," remonstrated the hostess. "You will give Miss Forsyth—or Una as I intend to call her—a very wrong impression of our domestic relations. My dear, Mr. Stacey must always have his joke, and you must not believe more than a third of what he says. Now come to dinner."

The dining-room was very beautiful; Una had never seen anything quite so sumptuous; the dinner was of the most *recherche* kind, the host and hostess so genial that she forgot to be shy and gave herself up wholly to the pleasures of the hour.

Afterwards she sang to them, accompanying herself, as Mrs. Stacey said regretfully, "My dear I don't know a note of music; I was one of a large family and father could not give us more than a plain education. Why, Dick and I were so poor when we married that our friends called us mad, but I've never regretted the day I took his name—we have been so happy together, sharing sunshine and showers, helping to carry each other's burdens—" and she laid one plump hand upon her husband's.

He was evidently moved by her words, but ashamed of showing this, broke in quickly, "My dear young lady, if you find any traces of incipient vanity in me, put them down to Mrs. Stacey's very injudicious flatteries. I am afraid she must be wanting something very costly, or she would not be at such trouble to please me. Oh, she is artful—very!"

It was such a happy evening that Una regretted its close and was delighted when Mrs. Stacey said, "You must come again, soon, or I shall be afraid you have found us dull old people; and you shall sing us some of the old songs—if you will?"

"I shall be very glad. Oh, no, Mr. Stacey, indeed you must not trouble to come with me; it is but a few yards to Woodhurst, and I am not nervous."

But tucking her hand in his arm he led her across the road, and having seen her safely home returned to his wife.

"Well," she said, questioningly, "do you like her?"

"Very much, Lottie; she is as nice as she is pretty; I hope she will come often."

"That depends upon her stepmother; she is not kind to her, I am sure, and Una is not happy. Then, although she does not complain, it is easy to see how very hard she is worked—did you see the marks on the forefinger of her left hand? Such little white hands, they are, that any discolouration shows most plainly. I believe she has all the care of the family wardrobe, and, ignorant as men are of such things, you must know it means a good deal. We must be very kind to the poor child, to recompense her—"

"Look here," interrupted Mr. Stacey, unceremoniously, "if you want to do good to her, you must be amiable to the stepmother. She rules the roost; and at times it is advisable to hold a candle to the devil." Never mind whether you like the lady or not, for Una's sake you must do more than tolerate her."

"Of course, you know best, Dick, but I hate deceit of any kind—"

"So do I—but pass the whisky, Lottie, I have not yet had my nightcap."



After the ice was broken Mrs. Stacey used frequently—almost daily—to “run over” to Woodhurst, where she was received with effusion.

She took Mrs. Forsyth driving, sometimes she called for the children, on which occasions she invariably went into the city, each child returning with some pretty or useful present.

She insisted that Mr. and Mrs. Forsyth should at least spend one evening in each week at Glencairn, so that when occasionally she asked for Una's society, Mrs. Forsyth could not graciously refuse it.

She had already learned to love the gentle-faced and gentle-voiced girl, and knowing now so much of her home life she was full of pity for her and indignation against her people.

She never saw Mrs. Forsyth absolutely unkind, she never heard her speak sharply to her stepdaughter; but in their frequent drives the children had innocently made many things plain.

One day Mabel would say, “Poor Sissie is very sad; mamma has been scolding her because nurse did not get Frankie's bath the proper heat this morning, and Sissie has so much to do, she never gets any rest, whilst nurse is lazy and fat, and sits idle all day. But mamma likes her and she doesn't like Sissie, though we do.”

Then another day, Rolf, the eldest boy, would say,—

“When I'm a man I'm going to have a pony-carriage, and drive Sissie—Una, you know, all over the world. She shan't be scolded any more, and she shan't work till she drops down—just like she was dead you know. I'm going to take care of her, and she shall have lots of pretty frocks, and books, and sweeties, because she's a darling, and I love her.”

Mrs. Stacey drew him very close to her then,—

“You are a very good boy, Rolf, I am sure; and sister Una must love you very dearly. Be kind to her always, dear, she deserves all that you can give her.”

She went home very thoughtfully, was there nothing she could do for her *protégée*? this girl who had stolen into her heart, and grown so inexpressibly dear to her. She was too young to be so unhappy, and she felt with a strong throbbing of indignation she could hardly accept the hospitality offered her on the morrow, in honour of Mrs. Forsyth's birthday. But when she spoke thus to Mr. Stacey, he said,—

“Swallow the pill for Una's sake,” and she, recognising the wisdom of his advice, followed it implicitly.

Una did not join them until quite late in the evening, and then she looked so weary that Mrs. Stacey could not refrain from comment. A slight flush rose to Mrs. Forsyth's face as she said.

“She is so very fond of exercise, in fact she overdoes it. She walked into Brayton this afternoon!”

“And back again?” questioned the other, “a distance of eight miles or more, and after being hard at work all the morning. My dear Una, I shall have to take you in hand,” but the kind eyes meeting the girl's said very plainly that their owner knew that the walk had not been optional. Una only smiled a little languidly and sat down beside her friend.

There was another guest present, whom Mrs. Stacey had frequently seen calling at Woodhurst, a tall, blonde man of thirty, with regular but cynical features, cold, blue-grey eyes, and a general air of opulence and command. He was especially attentive to Una, and now asked, with an inflection of tenderness in his voice,—

“Are you too tired to sing, Miss Forsyth?”

“Much too tired,” then at a warning glance from her stepmother, which Mrs. Stacey intercepted, she added, quickly, “but I will play your accompaniments if you wish it, Mr. Tralen.”

He evidently did, for he led her to the piano, and stood beside her whilst she played, turning the leaves; even when his song ended he remained at his post, for it was Mr. Forsyth who gave the next ballad, which was followed by a ditty in his wife's thin treble. Una was flushed and so evidently uneasy that when Mrs. Forsyth

sat down after exaggerated applause, Mrs. Stacey moved towards her.

“My dear girl,” she said in her cheerful voice, “it is positively brutal to keep you longer working for our amusement; rest and talk.”

Una was only too glad to do the first, and sank relievedly upon the couch; but she had scarcely enjoyed five minutes' leisure, when her stepmother, said,—

“Una, dear, I have been telling Mr. Tralen what a fine specimen of begonia your father brought home yesterday; you know so much more about such things than I, will you play the part of exhibitor.”

The swift expression of anger and pain which crossed the girl's face, told its own story to her friend, and she thought,—

“Oh, oh, madam; I see daylight. You mean to marry my little girl to Mr. Tralen—but I shall have something to say to that—she evidently hates and fears him.”

The greenhouse, which was in the rear of the house, extended the whole length, opening out from both dining and drawing rooms through the lace curtains Mrs. Stacey could just descry the two figures; and it was evident from their respective attitudes that Tralen was pleading for some favour which the girl was refusing. She rose with her most genial smile.

“Oh dear, Mrs. Forsyth, you will forgive an old woman's excessive love of flowers—begonias, too, are my favourites. With your permission I will join the young people,” and what could Mrs. Forsyth say? Only, when she had gone from the room, she remarked to her husband.

“She is a stupid old marplot, and her lord and master is not far behind in stupidity. What a relief it is to be able to open my mind to you, William. I could not have done so had old Stacey put in an appearance.”

Mr. Forsyth looked frowningly before him.

“It won't do to offend the Glencairn people, and we can't afford to break with Grainger Tralen; we have got to steer our course very carefully, or Heaven knows where we shall land.”

Meanwhile Mrs. Stacey had joined the young couple, and, linking her hand in Una's arm, said, with a smile at Tralen,—

“You cannot imagine how enthusiastic a botanist I am. My dear Una, what a splendid heliotrope!” She had seen the plant in question a hundred times, but she chatted on just to give the girl an opportunity to recover her ordinary manner; and “gushed” over the heliotrope until Tralen, in a temper, returned to the drawing-room, and the ladies were left alone.

“Now,” said her friend, “just tell me what that man has said to disturb you?”

“Oh, not here, dear Mrs. Stacey; come out upon the lawn; perhaps then I may. The windows are open, and—I might be overheard.”

“Very well, my dear, we will go outside;” and, with her hand still linked in the girl's arm, she drew her out under the starry sky. “Now, you can speak.”

“I am afraid,” said Una, “that Mr. Tralen was trying to make me understand that he likes me; and—and—oh, I am so wretched because I feel sure mamma and papa want me to say yes—”

“Well, he is young and good-looking; I suppose, too, he is eligible in every way?”

“Oh, yes; but surely you would not tell me to marry a man I absolutely dislike? There are times when he frightens me, although I can't tell why; but papa says he has never set his heart upon anything and failed to win it. Just now he has set his heart upon me—”

“But he isn't going to have you! Come over to-morrow, and we will discuss this matter together. I think, too, I shall have a pleasant surprise for you. Now, we will go in; but, first let me say to you, whatever may come do not be forced into a loveless marriage. You will live to rue it all your days; be true to yourself, and Heaven will help you!”

Then, as they entered together,—

“My dear Mrs. Forsyth, I broke a commandment when I looked at your begonia. I positively envy you its possession.”

## CHAPTER III.

As Una entered her friend's delightful reception-room, a young man rose from a lounge, and Mrs. Stacey, with a smile, remarking,—

“This is my surprise!” introduced him as her nephew, Roy Lancaster.

He was tall, even taller than Grainger Tralen, broad-shouldered, and muscular, with a dark, pleasant face and brown eyes, which smiled in unison with his mouth. It was no worthy of Tralen that his eyes refused to do this, and that they never softened with any passing emotion.

“I have been hearing so much of you, Miss Forsyth,” he said in a voice as pleasant as his face, “that I seem to know you already. Do you think we could have been acquaintances in a previous state—or do you quite pooh-pooh the idea of transmigration of souls?”

Una laughed.

“We have certainly not met before, and I believe just as little in the theory you mention as you yourself do.”

“Then we will fall back on that of electric affinity, for you seem to read my thoughts at a glance. And now, if you will trust yourself to such an indifferent Jehu as I, I am going to drive aunt and you to Thorpe, where she has a brother living. He is nearly as nice as his sister, which is saying a great deal for him.”

“My dear,” laughed Mrs. Stacey, happily, “if I took myself at Roy's valuation I should be a very conceited woman indeed. Come, my boy, we are waiting. I thought it would be nicer to dispense with Howell; one cannot talk so freely with one's coachman so near. And, to-day, we take the chaise, I like it best. Never being very brave, I console myself with the thought that, even should we have a spill from such a vehicle as this, we should not have far to fall.”

A little later they were out on the dusty high-road, with the sun pouring down upon them. But presently they entered a shady avenue about two miles in length, and, with the words,—

“Drive slowly through this, Roy, it is so exquisitely cool,” Mrs. Stacey closed her eyes and gave herself up wholly to drowsy enjoyment.

Roy turned to his companion,—

“You cannot imagine how delightful this is to a fellow who has been broiling and toiling for weeks in town. It is like a glimpse of Arcadia.”

“Mrs. Stacey told me you work dreadfully hard at your profession. Do you like it?”

“Immensely! and I owe it to her and uncle to do my very best. All that I am, all that I shall ever be I owe to them. There isn't one of the family who doesn't owe them something—”

“You are disturbing my rest by your fulsome praises,” droned Mrs. Stacey without opening her eyes. “I've done nothing more than my duty; there is Oliver—”

“Oh, yes,” the young man broke in, “Uncle Oliver is a brick! He is the Mr. Munden we are going to see, Miss Forsyth; and, thanks to his sister and her husband, he is now a prosperous man; but he had his hard times, and then he had four sons and a daughter to settle, so could not do so much for his needy relatives as he wished. I want you to understand, Miss Forsyth, that we came (with the exception of my father), wholly from the middle class, and we are rather proud of it.”

“You should be very proud,” the girl answered, “because you have lifted yourselves out of the old condition. Birth is only an accident, and I cannot think any credit is due to a man that he is born a prince. Oh, don't look at me in such a scared fashion, I am not a Radical,” and she laughed blithely, “but a dreadfully rabid Conservative! Still, I hold that we should give honour to whom honour is due, and that is to the man or woman who, by patient toil, lifts him or herself to a proud position.”

“I am glad to hear you speak like that; so many girls value a man according to his title and estate. I am afraid,” he added in a somewhat sad voice, “that once I was in danger of believing the vices belonged only to the upper ten, and, it is a sad thing to confess—my father gave me that impression. The bluest of blood was in his veins, but he was poor, and committed the unpardonable folly of marrying beneath him, with the result

that his influential friends and relatives cast him off. When the glamour of his love had worn away he revenged himself upon my mother, the truest wife and gentlest woman who ever breathed. He was an artist and once gave promise of great things, but the promise never reached fulfilment; and when he died (quite a young man) worn out by excesses, his only child felt nothing but an exquisite sense of relief. I don't know why I tell you these things," he added in a lighter tone, "but I suppose it is because you have such a sympathetic face, and something—I don't know what—recalled the past to me now, as vividly as though it happened but yesterday. I hope I haven't bored you?"

"Oh, no, I like to hear your reminiscences, although they are so sad, but I think that in this life of ours the bitter outweighs the sweet."

"That is a view you are not to take in future; you are too young to look on life with gloomy eyes."

She sighed a little, then asked,—

"And your mother? Does she still live?"

"No, she broke her heart at the loss of her most unworthy husband; they lie together at Highgate—by her wish; there, I will not dwell upon these things. We are leaving the avenue now—do you see that big, rambling, ivy-covered house in the dell? That is Uncle Oliver's place. Why, aunt, wake up; I believe you *really* were asleep, and not faking."

"Do I ever pretend anything?" asked Mrs. Stacey, sitting erect and speaking with great indignation, for all the merry twinkle in her eyes. "My dear Una, how can you listen quietly whilst he so grossly insults me!—why, there is Oliver coming to meet us. Stop at once, Roy, we can walk the remainder of the way."

"And your charioteer may consider himself ignominiously discharged—such is nineteenth century gratitude! Tell uncle I have gone round by the stables, and will join you as soon as I have put up Merrylegs."

A tall, military-looking man, advanced to meet them, exclaiming,—

"Why, Lottie, this is good! quite a charitable act, for I am all alone and at the end of my resources for something to do. This young lady, I feel sure, is Miss Forsyth; my dear, it gives me pleasure to meet one of whom I have heard so much. Come in, and let me bid you welcome to Marwell Graunge; I hope this will not be the last time you cross its threshold."

He spoke with old-fashioned courtesy, and so much kindness that Una had much ado to keep the tears back from her pretty eyes, because until lately she had been a stranger to gentle ways and words.

They entered a wide hall, on either side of which opened large low rooms, the ceilings of which were crossed by heavy oak beams, the mantels fantastically carved, and into one of these Mr. Munden led his guests.

"I am an old-fashioned body," he said, turning a benevolent face upon his young guest, "and I live so much alone since the boys' and my daughter married, that there is little chance of my becoming more modern in my habits. I dine at one, so now we will have high tea—Lottie goes in for fashion," smiling, "and I for comfort. I study my digestion, and the meal with me is really supper and tea combined."

Roy now entered.

"Ah! you rascal," said his uncle, "I wonder what you want that you come so early to see me; out with it whilst I am good-tempered."

"I want a good draught of your cider," answered Roy; "I am dying of thirst."

"You know where to find it," said Uncle Oliver, reaching down a silver tankard from a very high shelf, "if you don't re-appear in an hour I'll send Fowler to look after you—mark how ferocious he looks, Miss Forsyth," and laughing, he invited them into an adjoining room, where the table was already spread in most appetising style.

The centre-piece was a beautiful home-cured ham, which was flanked by meat pies, and a prime stilton. Then there was the newest of bread and yellowest of butter, with lettuces and cress to give a cool appearance to the whole; home-made preserves and jellies; a foaming tankard of ale

for those who cared to quaff it; fragrant tea and rich cream. As Una afterwards said to Mrs. Stacey, it was "a feast for the gods."

Then Uncle Oliver was so genial, so bent upon making her happy that she could but respond to his efforts, and Roy had so many tales to tell that the time flew all too swiftly for them and Mrs. Stacey protested they must be returning.

"Nonsense," said the host; "it won't be dark for a couple of hours, and if Roy doesn't know every step of the way, Merrylegs does. It is not often, Lottie, that you come out, and Miss Forsyth hasn't seen Roaring Dick's Bridge yet. It is the loveliest spot in the world, my dear; at least I think so—and you really must visit it. Roy will take you down, and the moon being at the full you will see it to advantage. Lottie, you will stay!"

"Oh, yes, if you put it that way, and when Una has seen the bridge, she will sing us one of my favourite songs, just as a sort of grace after meat, and then we must be going."

Twisting a wrap about her head Una walked with Roy through the lovely garden out upon the road, if road it could be called, because in this direction it consisted of a steep path, strewn with broken rock and large stones. So difficult was their progress that Roy lent her his arm until they came to a green field ending in another rugged lane, which, in its turn, led to Roaring Dick's Bridge.

It was a single plank, with an iron railing curving outwards, on either side; below it the little river fell into a deep pool, where the white circles of foam ever widened. On each side rose a steep incline covered with trees and brambles, and over all was the clear sky studded with myriad stars, illuminated by the silver moon.

"This is very beautiful," said Una, with a sigh of utter pleasure, "I did not dream we were so close to so much loveliness. But why call it 'Roaring Dick's Bridge'? this spot is worthy the consideration of the fairies."

"I don't think anyone knows the origin of its name. I never came across a soul that did; but it seems a sort of blasphemy, doesn't it? I should say Roaring Dick was some noteworthy roysterer of olden times. He might even have fallen in here and been drowned, for the plank was not always protected with rails. I remember the time when my cousins and I were soundly flogged for crossing it—such a worn and rickety passage it was—and although the river is shallow the current is swift, the pool beyond deep and dangerous; but we didn't think of such things then."

Meanwhile Mr. Munden was saying,—

"Well, Lottie, why are you throwing those young people together? Are you on match-making bent?"

"She is such a little darling," Mrs. Stacey answered, deprecatingly, "and would be just the wife for Roy. She isn't extravagant, but domesticated, bright and good. I wish she were my very own child; and, Oliver, she isn't happy at her father's home."

"Ah! I see, so you propose to give her one of her own. It is just like you, Lottie."

#### CHAPTER IV.

"TRALEN is growing impatient," said Mr. Forsyth, a month later. "He complains that he never has the least chance of speech with Una, and is furiously jealous of Lancaster. All this must be altered, Amelia. Do you hear?"

"Yes, dear," answered his wife, who was deeply attached to him; "but why? Be quite frank with me, William. Before Roy Lancaster came down here I was very vexed with Mrs. Stacey for seeming to fight against our plans; but all that is gone now. Of course Roy will inherit everything, and will be even a better *parti* than Mr. Tralen; and really, Roy is very nice."

"It isn't a question of niceness," answered her husband, gloomily (he had grown very moody of late) "but of safety. Look here, Amelia, this is how the case stands. If Una does not marry Tralen he will expose and ruin me."

"Expose! Ruin! are you mad, William? What do you mean? I must know."

He drew her down upon his knee whilst he whispered a few words. Her face changed and blanched, her eyes grew wide with fear. The next moment her arms were about his neck, her cheek laid to his, as she murmured,—

"Is that all? Oh, how you frightened me! But have no fear; Una will marry Tralen, although I am a bit sorry for Roy, because I am sure he cares for her, and he would have been the better match. But trust to me; you should have done so before, and you had better tell Una your wishes to-night. She will be more likely to listen to you than to me. To-morrow I will drop a hint of her engagement to Mrs. Stacey. It is a pity, because she has been very generous, and, of course, she will cease her gifts as soon as she knows Una is not for Roy. But it is for your sake, dear, and I do not mind any sacrifice where you are concerned. She will fret at first; but she knows there is no appeal against my decision and will submit, and Roy leaves Pondeigh next week."

Her face was not pleasant to look upon as she spoke, and yet its expression carried hope and comfort to Mr. Forsyth's heart.

Una was the child of his first love; but men are not like women, and the second wife had quite superseded the first, although her nature was purer, higher, nobler than Amelia's, perhaps it was for this very reason he loved her best, their spirits were more in touch with each other.

"I am fortunate in possessing you," he said, and through all her doubt and anxiety those words cheered the woman who held him even dearer than her children.

That evening his chance of speaking to Una came. He knew very well that his wife had contrived to detach the children from her sending them off early to bed.

In the back garden walked Una, a slender white-gowned figure, and to her her father went. It struck him she was prettier than ever. Her eyes were not so sad, and the smiles came more readily to her sweet lips.

"You, too, are tempted out by the beauty of the evening, papa!" she said, "how delicious it is after the 'heat and burden of the day.'" She cast back her head, with a little gesture, which recalled her mother unpleasantly to his mind. He did not want to think of the dead woman with this task before him. He had betrayed her trust and been neglectful of her child, and just a moment he thought, "better let things slide. Tralen may not be so bad as his word, and Lancaster is a good fellow." Then he remembered Amelia and the ten helpless little ones, and hardened his heart. "I want to talk to you seriously, my dear."

"Yes," answered the girl, not withdrawing her gaze from the clear blue vault above. "I am listening, papa."

The level light of the newly-risen moon fell athwart her face and figure, her eyes were dewy and innocent. If she had been a little more like other girls William Forsyth's task would have been easier.

"When you have done star-gazing," he said, petulantly, "I shall be able to talk; that is better," as she turned her grave regard upon him, "the fact is—er—Tralen isn't quite satisfied with your treatment of him. He has been speaking to me—and—and, well, you're a pretty girl, and young men are impressionable; I suppose you guess what he wishes?"

"Yes," she answered, very quietly, "he wants me to marry him."

No girl who loved a man would ever have spoken so calmly on such a subject; Mr. Forsyth felt his hopes slipping from him.

"That is so, Una, and I am extremely glad to find you are prepared to listen to him."

"But I am not, papa; you must make him understand that whilst I thank him for the honour he has done me, I can only refuse it. I do not love him."

"But love would come," he retorted, controlling himself by greatest effort, "and you could not hope to marry better. He is rich, young, good-looking—"

"But I do not love him," she repeated, "that is my only answer."

His eyes flashed.

"And for your own selfish fancies you will



cast aside such a good chance of settlement; as Mrs. Tralen you could materially assist your brothers and sisters—Grainger is prepared to be very generous to you—you can lift a heavy load from my shoulders, and your mother.”

Then she interrupted him hastily.

“Say that I can do all these things, what then? Am I to lie even at Heaven’s altar? Am I to take all this man’s gifts, and make him no recompense? Oh, I would do much for the little ones—and—and you—I do not consider I owe anything to mother—”

“Please to remember that she is my wife, and we claim your obedience.”

“I cannot give it now, father, dear father, even if you have forgotten my own dear mother, you cannot quite ignore the past. I am the child of the woman you first loved, for her sake be kind to me.”

“If your mother had lived she would have counselled submission to my will; I best know what is good for you, and I shall give Tralen permission to speak to-morrow; you will answer as I dictate. I am sorry that you should alienate my affection by your loveless demeanour, and most rebellious ways. I suppose that you have entertained some passing fancy for that addled young Lancaster which totally blinds you to Tralen’s merits—but it won’t do, Una, it won’t do. In this thing at least my will is law.” Then he left her standing white and still, under the changeful summer sky.

Gone for her was the beauty of the evening; gone all those bright dreams which of late had gladdened her hours, filled the toilsome days with pleasure. It had only wanted her father’s words to show her that she loved Roy, would love him until death came to blot his memory from her brain, the dear presentment of his truthful face from her mental vision. She must forget him, be as one dead to him! She must give herself to a man she loathed and feared, just to benefit the little ones—was it right? Was it her duty? She threw out her hands with a passionate gesture.

“Mother, my mother, help me to decide; teach me what it is that I should do!” and through the stillness of the summer night, a voice seemed to breathe,—

“Be true, be strong, be patient; he that shall endure to the end, shall receive his reward.”

Comforted a little she went back to the house and up to her room, but she could not sleep until the first grey streak of dawn was creeping into the room. Then her dreams were troubled, so that she rose unrefreshed and heavy-eyed; but there was no rest for Una, the usual routine must be faithfully followed, even though head and heart were aching, for Mrs. Forsyth was a martinet in such matters.

At noon Mrs. Stacey called, but Una did not see her, waiting vainly for permission to do so. The mid-day meal passed in uncomfortable silence, even the children feeling there was something unusual in the air; then, too, sister Una was very quiet throughout the afternoon, and they wondered still more, when in answer to her inquiry,—

“May I run off to Glencairn?” mamma responded sharply,

“Certainly not; you go there far too often. Of late you have neglected your duties, and have fallen into habits of indolence, which are plainly due to Mrs. Stacey’s influence.”

“Una lazy!” cried Mabel, “my lovely Una, oh, mamma how very cross you must be to tell such wicked fibs. Never mind, Una, she will let you go to-morrow,” and the child danced from the room, not heeding her mother’s faint rebuke. She was the favourite of them all, the most daringly unspoken, and she might transgress with impunity. Perhaps she forgot for awhile, in the frolic which followed, all about the good elder sister, but Una was recalled to her mind when later Mrs. Forsyth, said,—

“Mabel, tell nurse to put the little ones to bed, and you had better be going too—”

“Oh, I shan’t yet! it is only seven; I hardly ever go up until nine.”

“But I want the house to be quiet, Mr. Tralen is coming to-night. You may run up and tell Una to dress.”

Mabel laughed.

“I know why. Nurse says old daddy Tralen comes to court Una, and that she hates him. I am sure I do; I always make faces behind him when he comes, and so does Dallas; once we poured water on him as he passed under the schoolroom window—he looked so mad!”

“And I shall whip you both if I learn you have been so rude again. Mabel, you are quite old enough to know papa would be very angry to think his little girl could behave like a street child. And you must be very polite to Mr. Tralen, because he is going to marry Una and make us all rich. Now run away, and give her my message.”

The child flew upstairs, bursting most unceremoniously into Una’s room.

“You are to put on your best frock and hurry downstairs,” she cried, “mamma says Mr. Tralen is coming, and you are going to marry him. Oh, you gooby!”

“But I am not going to marry Mr. Tralen,” Una said, indignantly.

“Then one of you tells fibs; that’s all! But I wouldn’t be Mrs. Tralen for heaps and heaps of money. Why don’t you marry that nice Mr. Lancaster? Then you could live with Mrs. Stacey, and we need never say good-bye. Oh, Una, how red you are! I believe you like Mr. Roy best. I’ll tell him so—”

“No, no!” cried the girl, in an agony of distress, but Mabel was gone, and she continued her toilet undisturbed.

In the garden loitered Grainger. Mrs. Forsyth had been speaking encouragingly to him, but she was now called away, and Mabel joined him. He did not like children, but he knew this mite was a power in the house, and always endeavoured to propitiate her. So, taking her tiny hand in his, he said,—

“Now, Mab, I want you to show me your rabbits.”

“Not to-night, Grainger Tralen,” said this terrible child; “I am very angry with you, and I only show my pets to my friends.”

“Why are you angry? What have I done to offend you, Miss Mabel?”

“Why do you want to marry Una, and she hates you! So do I; and she never will like you, because you aren’t half so nice as Mr. Lancaster.”

He dropped the little hand as though it were a scorpion.

“Who told you to say that?” he asked, his brows contracting ominously.

“Nobody; but mother scolds, and Una is crying. If I were a man, like father, I would beat you; but I don’t worry much, because Roy is bigger and stronger than you, and won’t let you take Sissie away.”

“Mabel, go to bed!” said Mrs. Forsyth’s voice behind them. “Mr. Tralen, you must really pay no heed to my silly little girl. In some way they have learned that you want to rob them of Una, and are quite prepared to hate you in consequence.”

#### CHAPTER V.

“MRS. FORSYTH, you can’t deceive me! Why do you try? You don’t care a fig whether I suffer or not, but I tell you candidly that in my suffering you shall have share. I mean to marry her, even though she hates me ‘with the hate of hell!’ I love her! I will call her mine in spite of all, even though I break my own heart and hers! Do you follow me so far?”

“Yes,” answered Mrs. Forsyth, faintly; she was frightened by this exhibition of passion.

“Very well; let us proceed. You and I know what would happen to Forsyth if I chose to speak. I am prepared to be lenient, for your sake and Una’s, on the condition I have stated. I will even go farther, and promise Forsyth a lump sum of two thousand pounds on the day I marry his daughter.”

“You are very good,” she murmured. “Of course Una will listen—”

“That is not at all certain. She will probably say no. I have promised Forsyth to tell her nothing of what has occurred, so that my power

over her is materially lessened. *But I look to you for help; if you fail me you know the consequences of your folly.* Further, I insist that all communication between Una and the Glencairn people shall cease—”

“Hush!—of course I promise—here she comes. Why, Una dear, what a very long while you have kept us waiting. I wonder,” with an arch smile, “if you knew who kept watch for you?”

The girl’s pale face grew paler yet.

“Mabel told me that you and Mr. Tralen wanted me,” she answered, coldly. “I came almost immediately.”

“Good girl! An obedient daughter makes an obedient wife. Mr. Tralen, you will excuse me; I always like to hear the children’s prayers myself.”

“Quite right, Mrs. Forsyth,” with a sarcastic smile. “They are very edifying doubtless; but I thought that sort of thing rather out of your style.”

“I am not one to parade my religion,” she answered. “Una, dear, pray be good to Mr. Tralen; it is so dull for him with papa away.”

He watched the last flutter of her skirts; then, when she had disappeared, turned to his companion with the abrupt words,—

“You are prepared to hear me!”

“Yes,” she said, very gravely; “papa has told me your wishes, do not pain me and humiliate yourself by repeating them. Forget all about them, as *I will try to do.*”

“It is easy for you to say that; but what if I cannot obey you, Una?”

“I shall be very sorry, because I never can listen to you.”

“You would have done so willingly enough if Lancaster had not come on the scene.”

“You have no right to say that,” the girl retorted indignantly. “You *know* it is false. You are well aware that I never liked you, and if you are a gentleman you will leave Mr. Lancaster’s name wholly out of the question.”

He was beside himself with anger and love as he caught her hands and held them fast.

“I don’t care whether you hate me or not, I mean to make you my wife; and nothing you can do will turn me from my purpose. You think you are strong, but I am stronger. You believe you can wantonly defy me; if you go to that extreme I shall use the power I have over your father, and ruin you all at one swoop!”

“You take a very pleasant way to show your affection,” she answered, sarcastically (really she was developing a hitherto unsuspected courage); “and I cannot see what hold you have upon papa, unless indeed he has borrowed money of you, and that I can repay out of my little fortune; so I decline the very dubious honour you have offered me.”

He laughed unpleasantly,—

“You say *little fortune* advisedly, Miss Forsyth; and allow me to inform you that I was not referring to monetary obligations, although your father has borrowed of me freely. Ask him to tell you all that your refusal means; and then I think you will retract. My lips are sealed, or I would make it plain.”

“Can’t you set such a simple thing as a promise aside?” she asked, scornfully. “A man who can threaten a girl is not usually an honourable one.”

“Take care you do not go too far,” he said, hoarsely. “I am only human, and it may be for every cruel gibe you utter I shall exact payment *when you are my wife!*”

“I never shall be that,” she answered steadily; “nothing can justify the sacrifice my parents ask and you demand. I will never marry unless I can say my husband is lord of my heart and life;” and, hearing her stepmother approaching she hurriedly left him.

Mrs. Forsyth glided up to him.

“Well?”

“It is not well. She absolutely defies me and you; but she shall haul down her colours yet; she shall be taught submission to you. You understand the art with regard to *other women’s children*; and she shall be my wife before another Christmas is upon us. You know all that is involved in her refusal, it is for you to *compel* her to say yes, where she has said no.”

"I will do my best," Mrs. Forsyth answered faintly, "and you are quite certain that you have my kindest regard, my deepest esteem."

He laughed grimly.

"You are good at protesting, but if this pressure were not brought to bear upon you, you would gladly have given her to that upstart, Lancaster; just because he will have a few more thousands than I possess, and he would be more manageable than I."

"You are very unjust," murmured the lady; "I never was subjected to such suspicion or harshness before. But here is William; let us go in."

Poor Una! she passed through a very bitter ordeal that night when the solitary guest had departed.

"Why," she said in passionate protest to her father, "why should I be forced to marry a man I loathe? I am only eighteen; there is plenty of time; and—and—oh, papa, be kind to me!"

"I am kind; I want to secure your future happiness. Grainger worships you—" She interrupted swiftly, "And I hate him!"

"He hints evil even of you. Oh, father dear, if you owe him anything, cannot you repay it with my money? I don't need it. I have all that I want."

His eyes fell before hers; his face crimsoned then grew pale.

"You talk foolishly! You seem to imagine that five hundred pounds is a fortune. Still, you are good to offer so much. But, if you wish to please me, you must reverse your decision; believe me, I have only your welfare at heart; and, if you prove obstinate, I shall have but one alternative—you must leave home and earn your own livelihood. I have so many to provide for I cannot afford to keep you in idleness."

That was the cruellest blow of all. Was there ever an idle day in her life since Mrs. Forsyth came into it to mar it? Did she not toil early and late? Was she not first to rise—last to seek rest?

A sob rose to her lips, tears rushed to her eyes; her trembling hands went up to cover her white face.

"Oh, you are cruel, unjust!" she cried; "but—but, if it must be, I will go. I do not want to rob the children of their bread; only—father, I, too, am your child!"

"That will do," remarked Mrs. Forsyth, coldly. "Your father is tired, and unequal to any scene. Go to your room and pray for wisdom and filial obedience."

Still sobbing, Una left them together. On the landing she met Mabel in her trailing night-gown.

"I heard all!" she whispered; "and, oh, what a silly you are to cry. Why didn't you stamp and say 'I shan't!' like I do?"

But Una was far too depressed even to reply. A great fear filled her whole heart; and, as she tossed to-and-fro on her bed, she muttered again, and again,—

"In the end I must give in! Oh, how cruel they are! Roy—Roy! the time will come when even you will despise me!" And she wept hopelessly until break of day, when she fell into an uneasy slumber.

Three or four days passed, and Mrs. Stacey had caught no glimpse of Una; she was virtually a prisoner, her time being spent wholly in the schoolroom and her own chamber. Even her meals were taken in solitude and she was not permitted to see any chance caller.

Roy waxed impatient as the days went by; his stay was growing so near a conclusion, and he had had no opportunity to speak the words which were to make or mar his life.

"Aunt Lottie," he said, shamefacedly, when the fourth day was gone, "what has got Miss Forsyth? Is she ill; or have we offended her?"

The lady looked troubled.

"I can't understand it, Roy; but I am quite certain something is wrong at Woodhurst. I called yesterday, and the day before, and the servant said Mrs. Forsyth was not at home. It was an untruth, for I caught a glimpse of her as she vanished through the greenhouse; and Miss Forsyth was engaged. Three days ago, when I did see Mrs. Forsyth, she more than hinted that

Una was engaged to that howid Grainger Tralen. My boy, don't be alarmed, he shall not have her, because she hates him, and I have other plans for her. I believe, however, that a great deal of pressure is being brought to bear upon her."

"Then it must end at once!" Roy interrupted decisively. "You know my wishes, aunt; and, although I would far rather have spoken to Una first, as matters have taken such an unforeseen turn, I will address myself to her father, and to-night!"

"Good boy! You may tell him, on my authority, that you are your uncle's heir, and your position is, consequently, superior to Mr. Tralen's. It is of no use appealing to any but the mercenary side of his character. I don't think he has a grain of love for my little favourite."

That night, when Mr. Forsyth had made himself comfortable in an easy-chair, exchanged his boots for slippers, and loaded his pipe, he said to his wife,—

"Well, is there any sign of weakness in Una? Is she giving in?"

"I really think so," she answered, quite cheerfully. "She has been crying for hours, and though she refuses her food, speaks very meekly—oh, she must yield to our united efforts; though I do think it a pity she cannot marry Lancaster. He is generous, whilst Grainger Tralen looks twenty times at a coin before he will part with it. Don't you think, William, that if you paid him in full he would withdraw his suit?"

"No I don't. If he could get nothing but revenge for Una's slight, he would take it—even though it cost him thousands. My honour is in his hands, if he chooses to expose me, it means public disgrace for me, beggary for you and the children—who the dickens is it calling at this hour," he broke out impatiently, as the hall-bell clanged loudly.

"Mr. Lancaster, if you please, sir, he wants to see you particular," said a maid a second or two later.

"But I won't see him, it is preposterous at such an hour—"

Mrs. Forsyth laid her hand warningly upon his shoulder, "My dear, Mr. Lancaster has delicately postponed his call for your convenience. Tell Mr. Lancaster, your master will join him presently;" then as soon as they were left alone, she whispered, "You must see him, if only to dismiss him, but if it is possible to make terms do—could you not 'hedge' as the betting folks say."

"No," impatiently. "I can do nothing; I am bound hand and foot, literally Tralen's slave, or I would kick him from the place. I hate him. But I do think you might have spared me this interview, you know how much I hate to do anything unpleasant."

"That is so like a man, dear."

## CHAPTER VI.

He found Roy standing tall and resolute looking in the drawing-room, and he refused to be seated, as without a moment's hesitation he plunged into his subject.

"I must apologise for the lateness of my visit as I was particularly anxious to see you, I purposely delayed it. The fact is, Mr. Forsyth, I want your permission to speak to your daughter. I am willing to make a plain statement of my position, to furnish you with all the information you desire, and in return I ask that I may be allowed to plead my own cause with Una."

"You speak very honourably, and in a manner that does you so much credit that I am sorry to inflict pain or disappointment upon you. To be equally open, I must tell you that Una has long been all but promised to Mr. Tralen; I thought you knew—although not yet published, their engagement is quite an accepted fact with our friends—Mrs. Stacey is not ignorant of it."

"I beg your pardon; she certainly received some dark hints regarding the affair from Mrs. Forsyth; but she believed them to be merely the vague expression of that lady's wishes, as Una has repeatedly declared her aversion to Tralen. If there is no actual bond between them at least

you will allow me to try my luck. You cannot take exception to my position; I am authorised both by my aunt and uncle to say I am sole heir to their extensive property, that on my marriage my allowance will be doubled—provided my choice of a wife pleases them—"

"My dear sir," said Mr. Forsyth paternally, "I am not a mercenary man; on the other hand I am a stickler for birth—Mr. Tralen is a gentleman."

"But," interrupted Roy, flushing, "on my father's side I am allied to the best blood in England, and pardon me if I remind you that your daughter is the descendant of tradesmen and tradesmen's daughters."

"So far as your knowledge serves," interpolated the other, "and beside all this Una herself is greatly attached to her lover, notwithstanding her denial of it. She is a good girl, but good girls have their weak points, and hers is coquetry, doubtless she encouraged you to believe you had her regard, and then frightened at the climax she foresaw to her folly, cut herself wholly adrift from Glencairn. I am sorry, most sorry, especially as Tralen has suffered too, but he has forgiven her, as I hope you will—and as a man of honour I ask you not to attempt a meeting which could only be painful to you and embarrassing to her."

"You have uttered a tissue of lies," Roy cried, losing his temper at last. "I no more believe your statement than I believe the millennium is at hand, and I warn you that I shall endeavour to see Miss Forsyth."

"Thanks—I shall take precautions to avert such a catastrophe; and now I suppose we may consider the interview closed; I am sorry that your violence prevents us parting as friends; doubly sorry that I must decline to receive any of the Glencairn people as they are your emissaries, and I will not have Una tampered with. Your attentions perhaps have a little unsettled the clear balance of her mind, but when once you are removed from her, she will return gladly to the old love and allegiance."

Not another word did Roy say; he dared not trust himself lest he should insult her father beyond all forgiveness; white of face, resolute of purpose, he left the house and crossed to Glencairn where, of course, Aunt Lottie waited for news "I don't see what you are to do," she said, tearfully, "but by some means we must convey news to that poor child; I don't believe one word of the story. They are keeping her in confinement until she promises to marry Tralen—now what is their motive? Be sure they have one—if you can discover it, we will save her from self-sacrifice which means misery—it is you she loves, Roy, her eyes have told me that again and again—for her love's sake use your best energies to rescue her—"

All that night, when he lay sleepless, Aunt Lottie's words rang in his ears, "What is their motive?" and he determined to seek it out, but should he discover it in time to save his darling from what appeared to be inevitable? He knew how gentle and timorous she was, how ready to sacrifice herself for others, and he was afraid. If only he could send her a message! If only she were really assured of his love! But the last day of his stay came and no chance of communication had offered; in a most melancholy mood he paced the narrow strip of platform waiting for his train. All at once he heard the patter of small feet behind him, and a breathless voice which gasped his name; turning he saw Mabel, her fair hair flying about her flushed cheeks, and her eyes bright with triumph.

"Mr. Lancaster," she said, when she could find breath for speech, "I meant to see you before you left Pondleigh, and I heard nurse say you were going by the twelve train. So I coaxed mamma to let me come with her (nurse, I mean) to see to see a parcel."

"Yes, yes," he said, eager for news of Una, "but have you nothing to tell me of your sister?"

"Oh! how rude you are to interrupt a body in that fashion. Of course I should not have come to see you except for her, although she doesn't know it. But I've heard nurse and Ann talking, and they say you and Una are in love with each



other, only papa wants her to marry old Tralen. But you won't let her, will you? We should hardly ever see her if she did, because though he makes pretence to like us, he doesn't really; and Una she cries and cries—I wouldn't. I would run away—and mamma won't let her see anybody, not even me; but I listen outside her door and hear ever so much more than they guess. Mr. Lancaster do you love Una very, very much?"

"Very much," he answered, smiling in spite of himself at the naive question, the upturned, sharp little face, "so much that I don't mean your bogie man to take her away from me. Do you think, Mabel, you could carry a message from me to her, quite safely, and let nobody know. Perhaps I ought not ask it (a little sadly, because it seemed to him he was teaching the child cunning), but I want to comfort Una; and then, when she has read my message, perhaps she will give you a little note which you will manage to carry to Mrs. Stacey. I may trust you, Mabel?"

"Do I look like a person you couldn't? Make haste to get it written; in a minute they will signal the train, and then where will you be without me to help you?"

Realising the wisdom of her advice he hurriedly wrote:—

"My beloved; if indeed you hold me dear, be true to yourself and me. Remember I do not believe one jot or tittle of the idle statements I have heard, and that my endeavour is to save you from vain sacrifice and certain misery. If you love me, if you bid me hope, at least let me know this through the medium of our trusty messenger. But whatever your answer my services are yours now and always.—R. L."

Tearing the page from his pocket-book he folded and gave it to Mabel—only just in time, for the train steamed into the station, and there was no chance of farewell between them or instruction from him. But the child was satisfied, and dancing her way back to the stolid nurse, said,—

"Come along; it's nonsense to stay longer. The parcel hasn't arrived, so we had better go home as quickly as we can."

"Miss Mabel, I'll tell you ma; she'll be real mad when she knows you've been talking to that nasty Mr. Lancaster; she said you wasn't to speak—"

"Be quiet, nurse," retorted the mite, "you can tell mamma just what you please; but I shall tell her too that you're always chatting to Mrs. Stacey's gardener—and last night I saw him kiss you;" then she stalked on in front, leaving the maid considerably suppressed. If the truth must be told, Mabel was a power in the house; the brightest, cleverest of the young brood, and it was an established fact that the servant who offended her little ladyship was doomed to summary dismissal. Over-indulgence to her whims and caprices, the constant sight of her mother's shrewish and false character bade fair to spoil a really lovable nature; but her affection for Una, which indeed amounted almost to passion, was her safeguard, and in the future would be her salvation; for you may easily believe that neither Roy nor Una would ever forget her services. Reaching home she sauntered leisurely upstairs, passing through the corridor several times, playing shuttlecock just to divert attention from her proceedings; and then when it was quite safe she thrust Roy's note under Una's door, having first carefully wrapped it in a piece of manuscript paper on which she had written:—

"Make haste with your answer, Una dear, and I will give it to Mrs. Stacey as soon as I can. Roy says you shan't marry the bogie man, so don't cry any more."

Presently a note was slipped under the door; Una's voice, sounding strange by reason of her emotion, said,—

"Are you there, Mabel? Oh, Heaven bless you, dear," and without waiting to reply the child pounced upon the message, and scampered away, afraid of detection. All day she watched for a chance to deliver it, but none came; on the morrow, however, she was more fortunate, en-

countering Mrs. Stacey just beyond Woodhurst. The lady instantly stopped, and despite the presence of the nurse, said,—

"Why, Mabel, what a stranger you are! Why do you never come to see me now? And pray how is Una?"

"You can walk before, nurse," said Mabel, authoritatively, whilst she favoured her friend with a warning glance.

"I beg your pardon, miss and ma'am," rejoined the maid, "but mistress said you wasn't to be let out of my sight; I'm sure it isn't any pleasure to keep you so close; but I hope I know my duty."

"Go on before!" cried Mabel, stamping her foot in sudden passion. "Mamma didn't mean you should disobey me, and if she did I don't care; I always do as I like, I always will."

"Mabel, Mabel!" remonstrated Mrs. Stacey, "do you know how badly you are behaving! My dear little girl, mamma's will at present must be your law."

Just a moment the wide blue eyes regarded her with profoundest astonishment, then the child turned hurriedly to go, indignant that her well-meant efforts should be frustrated. But Mrs. Stacey caught her by her shoulder, and drawing her gently to her side.

"What, not one good-bye? not one tiny kiss Mabel? you are grieving me very much."

The shrewd little face softened, the slender arms went up to embrace her friend, whilst adroitly one little hand thrust Una's note into her bosom, and in a whisper came the words,—

"When I can, I will put a paper under your gate to tell you all about Una. When it is fine, mamma lets me run up the road with my hoop about ten—you must look for me every morning," then quite loudly, "Good-bye, some day I shall come to see you, again," with which words she turned to the waiting nurse, "I am ready to go now."

"Well, miss, I shall tell your ma."

"If you dare."

## CHAPTER VII.

Roy lay back pondering over his aunt's words; had closed his eyes, and was so motionless that his fellow travellers might well be pardoned for believing him asleep. There were two of them, evidently city men, and their conversation passed him by, until one uttered a name which could not fail to arrest his attention; but he was careful not to give any sign of this.

"I tell you," the first was saying, "that Forsyth is on his last legs; he has been going down hill for a long time back."

"Well," said number two, "he has a heavy drag in the way of a family; fool he was to marry a woman so much younger than himself. Still, although his business falls very short of what it once was, I don't think he will come to grief so long as Grainger Tralen supports him."

"Tralen wants to marry his daughter, they say. I won't vouch for the truth of the report; but the girl is rather pretty and extremely nice-mannered."

"Forsyth had money with his first wife, did he not?"

"Yes, a mere trifle; a few hundreds. I believe he and the girl shared equally; but her's was strictly tied up—he could not touch it even if he wished—rather rough on him when ever so small a sum might avert failure."

"Pooh! what is the use of throwing good money after bad as the saying is; bless you, he could only stave off exposure for a little while; before the winter has set in you'll see his name in the *Gazette*. Ah! you get out here? Good-bye, glad to have seen you—and when the crash comes call me a prophet in Israel."

Two stations further on the second man also alighted, and Roy was left to his own thoughts. Here was the "motive" of which Mrs. Stacey had spoken; and yet there must be more behind. "It stands to reason," thought the young man, "that Forsyth would guess we would do as much for him as Tralen would, if he gave his consent to our engagement, if only to save my wife's name. Depend upon it, there is a great

deal more in his refusal than meets the eye, and I am going to find out the truth. Heaven helping me, I will call my darling, 'wife' yet."

With this purpose in view, he went to Somerset House immediately on his arrival in town, and after a prolonged search lit upon the will of Lois Forsyth. It was very simple; in brief language, that is as brief as the law allows—the deceased Lois had bequeathed her little fortune in equal shares to husband and child. William Forsyth could at once claim his, the girl's was to remain intact until she attained her majority, unless, went on the testatrix, "unforeseen need shall arise, when, by her consent, after she is of an age to judge rightly—which age I stipulate to be eighteen, the said William Forsyth may borrow of her at reasonable interest. And this I will, that whatever may chance, my child shall not feel the pinch of poverty, and well-knowing that my husband will not misjudge me."

To his legal mind everything seemed suddenly clear, without her consent or knowledge Forsyth had drawn and used Una's little fortune, and dared not confess the wrong he had done.

If he could prove this he could boldly claim the girl; he would even find means to silence Tralen; but how was he to prove it? There was the rub. He brooded for a whole week over the subject, then he determined to cautiously interview Forsyth's bankers. In the meantime he sent comforting notes to Una which she never received until long after, Mrs. Forsyth keeping strict watch and ward over that most unruly member of the flock, Mabel. But at the close of the week she received an invitation from an aged, capricious and wealthy aunt, commanding, rather than inviting, her to spend a couple of days with her. Mrs. Forsyth grimaced horribly over the prospect, but being a daughter of mammon, she never for an instant contemplated a refusal.

"You will go with me, Mabel," she said, "and I hope you will remember not to tease Aunt Maria about her wig and her false teeth."

"I shall steal them if she is extra nasty," remarked the Infant Terrible.

"If you do I will whip you; Aunt Maria is old and she is very rich."

"What a pity she doesn't die and leave us her money. Oh dear, how I hate to go; must I really, mamma? She is so odd, and—so very, very nasty."

"You had best not tell her so," answered Mrs. Forsyth as she went from the room to make preparations for this most unexpected excursion. To Ann she said "do not admit anyone during my absence," and the girl having promised obedience, watched her go with a glad heart.

The coach-house, which was utilised for various purposes, was in a state of repair, and Ann, sharing nurse's opinion that when "the cat's away the mice will play," discarded cap and apron, donned her Sunday gown, and went out to enjoy a gossip with the workmen.

House and children were alike neglected; the latter were disporting themselves upon the lawn, shouting, romping, revelling in this unexpected and delightful freedom.

From her window Una could see them all; a slight smile even curved her sensitive lips at the elephantine advances of the workmen, the open coquetry of the maids.

Then she went to her desk, and opening it, counted her poor store of money; she had quite enough to take her to Liverpool, and it was borne upon the poor child that if she could but withdraw her monies from the bank, all persecution with regard to Tralen would be at an end.

To her, five hundred pounds with the accumulated interest of years seemed a small fortune, and she well knew the clauses of her mother's will. Slowly she dressed, and then prepared to go downstairs; but the door was locked, she remembered hearing her stepmother say to the nurse "Give the key to Mr. Forsyth on his return, and don't forget to take in Miss Una's supper."

A sigh of utter despair broke from her lips, and she sank half fainting upon her bed.

But the thought of Roy upheld her. Gently lifting the sash she looked below, the drip from her window to the porch was a mere nothing to one so light and agile as she; and then the

trellis work would lend itself to her purpose. She could return long before her father reached home and oh! what joy to place her gift in his hand, to see his eyes once more fill with love for her, and know that she was free for Roy to win; for, of course, Roy would not mind that she went to him empty handed.

Acting upon her rapidly-formed plans, she alighted in safety upon the gravel path, and darting across the lawn, opened the gate, closed it quietly behind her, and then made her way to the station.

She had to wait ten minutes for the up-train, ten long awful minutes, because the fear of capture was upon her. But at last she was well on her way, and reaching Liverpool went at once in the direction of the bank. There she asked for Mr. Pleylell (the manager) and presently a big, benevolent looking man appeared, asking courteously what was her business.

"I am Miss Forsyth," she said timidly, "and if you please—if it is quite convenient to you, I would like to see you alone."

He led the way to the bank parlour, and having motioned her to a seat said, "I shall be glad to listen to you, Miss Forsyth, at once."

"Oh, thank you," murmured Una, who was dreadfully ignorant of business in any form, "I will not detain you long. I merely wanted you to give me all that is due to me—every penny of it—I want it for a very urgent purpose."

Mr. Pleylell stared at her as though he thought her demented.

"My dear young lady, your account with us was closed twelve months ago," he answered, "and at your own discretion. I thought at the time you were rather foolish, although I admired your filial affection, and of course at eighteen you could decide for yourself."

She seemed about to speak but checked herself; something in the manager's face warned her to be cautious for her father's sake; and seeing the look of blank disappointment in her eyes Mr. Pleylell went on very kindly,—

"You had but five hundred pounds with us."

"But—but—" she stammered "there would be the interest."

He smiled condescendingly.

"Even after some years that would be a mere trifle on so small a sum; and we give only two and a half per cent. I am afraid you do not quite understand such matters. I am very, very sorry, but there is absolutely nothing for you." Then as a sudden suspicion crossed his mind, "Of course this sum was drawn with your consent? We had your signature."

"Yes," said Una, faintly, whilst the colour faded more and more from her pretty face, "papa was pressed for money, and—and I wanted to help him."

She was dreadfully ignorant of such matters, but she had gathered a little knowledge from the newspapers, and it flashed upon her that if her father had withdrawn her deposit, it had been done by forgery, and that he could even be imprisoned for such an act. At any cost he must be saved, so when Mr. Pleylell said, tentatively, "You are nineteen, I suppose, as this money was drawn a year ago?"

She answered in a bolder tone than before.

"Yes; I am so sorry to have troubled you, but you will forgive me for taking up so much of your time, I don't understand business, and I thought there must be a little money due to me," and then she went away, whilst a cloud settled on the manager's brow.

"There is something not quite right in this case," he thought, "we ought to make inquiries; but if they should result as I fear, Forsyth would have to stand a trial, and it would certainly end in a long imprisonment. Better accept the girl's word, he is her father, and there are ten little ones besides. Unless further developments occur, I'll let the matter rest, and it will always be easy for us to clear ourselves."

Consequently, Mr. Pleylell took no steps in the affair, but he thought a very great deal of Una. He was a kind-hearted man with very easy, not to say "adaptable" principles, and he would far rather excuse than accuse a sinner, on the plea that the latter course meant trouble to himself. But it would have grieved

him dreadfully had he guessed that Una left the bank quite penniless; that weak and exhausted as she was by confinement and insufficient diet, she must walk a distance of twelve miles to reach her home. Mr. Pleylell's charity was of the most slipshod kind. He would give to the veriest cad or scoundrel in the street, rather than utter that—to him—unpleasant word "No." So folks spoke well of him, and he lived very much in the odour of sanctity, even cheating himself into the belief that he was a born philanthropist. And had he known how destitute Una was, he would have carried her off to his beautiful home, where she would have fared sumptuously; but being once away the chances are that he would have totally forgotten her, some fresh object of benevolence having attracted his wavering attention. So it was that he allowed her to leave him; and filled with misery and anxiety she traversed the dreary streets, often losing her way. But at last she was well upon the homeward road—only, how far away it seemed; how very weak she was—would her strength be sufficient for her day? She feared not.

## CHAPTER VIII.

MR. MUNDEN had walked down to Roaring Dick's Bridge in a very thoughtful frame of mind. He was not a little troubled, for, whilst he was dining with the Staceys, Forsyth had rushed in with the intelligence that Una was missing, had not been seen since early morning, when she had left Pondleigh for Liverpool. He had telegraphed his wife to return at once, and now he came full of suspicion to question Mrs. Stacey. That lady, however, declared her utter ignorance of Una's movements, with such evident truth that William Forsyth's heart sank with an awful fear. Was it possible that the girl had gone off with Roy, or driven to desperation by the harsh treatment she had undergone, found her way to some convenient spot where she might make her own quietus? In either case he was a ruined man; he knew Tralen quite well enough to feel sure he would exact his "pound of flesh" under any circumstances. And surely in the anguish of the following hours in a measure he must have expiated his sins against his child. Mr. Munden regarded him very curiously whilst he told his plausible story. Then he remarked (with what Mrs. Stacey called abominable callousness) that he must be getting home as the hour was late, and The Grange a lonely place for women; he had left only Mansfield (the housekeeper) and the maids in charge of it. But he did not drive directly from Glencairn to Thorpe; he went in the direction of the station, where he telegraphed to Roy:—

"Is Una with you; if not, come down at once?"

Then he waited for the reply. When it came it read simply,—

"No; leave here by mail; send trap to Liverpool, cannot travel further to-night."

Mr. Munden, with a profound sigh, climbed into his dog-cart and drove home at a rapid rate. To Mansfield he said,—

"I expect Mr. Roy by the mail. Fowler must drive to Liverpool to meet the train, and the maids can go to rest at their usual time. You have something in the larder, I suppose, to satisfy his needs."

Mansfield laughed.

"I should say so, sir, and Mr. Roy is never hard to please."

So taking his pipe her master walked out of the gardens, towards Roaring Dick's Bridge. When well within sight of it, he started, uttered a hasty exclamation, then hurried forward. Prone upon the plank was a woman's figure, perilously near the edge, she neither moved nor seemed to breathe; was she dead, or—drunk? He hated himself for the last thought, as he lifted her heavy head, and saw the white sweet face of Una Forsyth.

"Heaven bless my soul," he said, "what was she doing here? Surely she did not mean to be rash or wicked! Poor little girl—Una! Una! my dear, pray speak. But she lay un-

conscious in his arms, and lifting himself erect he set his face towards The Grange. He was by no means a young man, but he still possessed great strength and energy, besides which the thought that Roy, his favourite nephew—the lad he had coveted for his son—loved her, gave him greater strength; so that he carried Una safely to the house. In the hall Mrs. Mansfield met him; she would have exclaimed but for his warning voice,—

"Hush! are all the maids in bed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then we are safe; I can trust to your discretion and kindness, Mansfield. The young lady, for very good and sufficient reasons, has left her home, and she must remain here until affairs are a bit settled—in secrecy, you know. You, yourself, will attend upon her. I will carry her up to the Guest Chamber, and no one but yourself and her loyal friends must learn where she is hidden. You understand me?"

"Perfectly, sir," and she followed him upstairs where he left her alone with the unconscious girl. Very much later she joined him. "She has come to herself, sir; but it was hard work to bring her round; and she's that exhausted I don't think she ought to be excited any further to-night. I've given her some port, and persuaded her to eat a few biscuits—after a few hours' rest she will be better, and with your permission, sir, I'll stay with her to-night. Poor dear, she's too nervous to be left alone in a strange room."

"Very well, Mansfield; you know best, and your kindness will not be unrewarded."

About two in the morning Roy arrived, and he had so much to tell of what he had learned and suspected. Mr. Munden was full of concern for his poor little guest and so anxious to hear her story, that the time flew by unnoted, until the grey light broke in through the curtained windows, and Roy, with a laugh, said,—

"We had best make a day and a night of it, uncle. If we went to our rooms we should not sleep, and I think we ought to go to Pondleigh as soon as we can. Aunt Lottie will want to hear all the truth, and, of course, Forsyth won't leave for business this morning under existing circumstances. Now, the only thing is to interview Una and learn all she can tell us. It must have been something of great importance which took her to Liverpool."

Here Mansfield entered.

"If you please, sir, Miss Forsyth is rested and much better; she is only anxious to see you because she has a message she wishes you to carry to her father. I've dressed her, and moved her into Miss Maisie's room, as it is so much more cheerful."

"Very well, Mansfield." Then, as she left the room, "Roy, you had best see her; she will confide more to her sweetheart than to an old man like me. And if it is as you suspect, we will take her on to Lottie's until we see what Forsyth will do in the matter. If we have no cause against him, why here she remains until we can form other plans. It is an awful pity that she is a minor, or we could settle all difficulties by getting you married at once."

Roy went at once to Una, who had been prepared by Mansfield for his advent. She was looking very pale and ill, but her face brightened into smiles as he entered; and, rising hurriedly, she held out both hands to him. He did not accept them, nothing less than herself would satisfy him; and, taking her in his arms, he kissed her again and again, until the roses—faint, but pretty ones—bloomed once more in her cheeks.

"My darling!—my little darling!—my own dear wife to be! What a great deal I have to tell you, and what matters of importance you must confide in me. What were you doing at Thorpe so late last night? Why are you not at home?"

And then, after some hesitation, she told him all her story; ending with the words,—

"We must tell papa just what I have discovered, and that he is heartily—oh, most heartily—welcome to my little money—you won't mind that I am penniless!—and papa shall defy Mr. Tralen by



saying 'You have no hold upon me; the money was my daughter's present.' Poor papa! he has so many little ones to provide for, and I am quite certain he meant to pay it all back. He has, I believe, borrowed money, too, of Mr. Tralen, but he will find means to pay it back. He will be quite another man with this fear of disgrace removed."

"Yes, dear," answered Roy, who was not at all certain of his rival's conduct in the matter; "and if Mr. Forsyth has borrowed only to a reasonable extent I can promise him repayment. From today he must go out of our lives altogether."

"Oh, how good you are to me. Roy, last night I thought that grief would kill me; I felt even an insane desire to fling myself from Roaring Dick's Bridge. I had not any hope left, and I was so very weary. It was Heaven's goodness which brought Mr. Munden to me then. When shall I ever repay you all for your lovingkindness?"

"That is a matter we will discuss later on," smiled Roy.

Thickly veiled, Una was presently driven to Glencairn, where Mrs. Stacey rejoiced over her exceedingly, then Mr. Munden and Roy walked over to Woodhurst, where they found everything in a chaos, even Mrs. Forsyth having lost her mental balance. But she greeted them with some show of cordiality, and, at once conveying them to her husband's presence, said,—

"You are very good to call so early, knowing our need of condolence."

And then Roy broke in very placidly,—

"Rather, we came to congratulate Mr. Forsyth on his fortunate escape from a hard taskmaster. Sir, I am glad to tell you Grainger Tralen has no longer any power over you. Your daughter has voluntarily declared that the money you, without her knowledge, borrowed was a present from her; consequently you need have no fear of your enemy, and Una is free to marry whom she pleases."

"Thank Heaven!" cried Mrs. Forsyth, piously. "I felt no good would ever arise from a compact with that man." (What a convenient memory she had.)

But her husband still looked gloomy. He did not attempt to deny his betrayal of the dead woman's trust, he felt it was useless; but he said, heavily,—

"I always meant to repay Una, and I shall do so yet; but I am under heavy obligations to Tralen. I owe him a lump sum of a thousand pounds; and—fool that I was—I gave myself to him by confessing my—my—error. If I refuse to give him Una, he not only can put me to open shame, but can claim every sou I possess."

"Stacey and I are prepared to take over your debts for your daughter's sake," said Mr. Munden, coldly. "Tralen is bowled over every way. But we shall only befriend you on condition that Una marries Roy."

"Oh, pray, agree to any terms!" cried Mrs. Forsyth. "These mean salvation for us all. Really, Mr. Roy, I am sorry I fought against you, but I was acting in my husband's interests, and so—you will forgive me?"

"Pray, do not apologise," the young man answered, stiffly. "I quite understand you."

Mabel came running in.

"Oh papa! mamma! why, Mr. Roy, you are here, and if you please the 'bogey man,' has just come to hear news of Una. Howell has taken his horse, so I guess he means to stay. Shall I let him see you?"

"Certainly," remarked Mr. Munden, "we shall be most delighted to meet him here. I would travel a long way for such a pleasure."

So Tralen was admitted. With a scowl he looked round, then said, sullenly,—

"A family convuls! What does it mean, may I ask?"

"It means," replied Mr. Munden, "that we are ready to discharge all debts owing to you, by William Forsyth, on condition that we have the pleasure of witnessing your ejection from Woodhurst. It means, too, that you have no longer any hold over your victim."

"How about the trust monies which he mis-

applied?" questioned Tralen, white to the lips. "Can he make black white, or foul fair? If Miss Forsyth were here she might have something to say in the matter on her behalf."

"Miss Forsyth is here to speak for herself," said a quiet voice, and turning they saw Una supported by Mrs. Stacey. Turning her beautiful eyes upon her tormentor, she went on. "Sir, that which is given cannot be recalled, nor do I wish to recall my gift to my dear father" (here she laid both hands lovingly upon his shoulders). "You have all the while been labouring under a mistake, and have taken advantage of my seeming ignorance to persecute my father. He is, thanks to my dear friends, quite out of bondage now."

Tralen laughed harshly.

"Is he, Miss Forsyth? That remains to be proved. By your mother's will you could not draw one penny of your fortune for his benefit until you were eighteen. Your father drew it all out a year ago. Now you see where my luck comes in; and by Heaven I will make you all gnash your teeth with despair."

He dashed out of the house. The next moment they heard his horse's hoofs clattering upon the gravel pathway, then out upon the road.

He was riding furiously, and his face was set hard with rage.

"It is all over for us," groaned Mr. Forsyth; and as his wife put her arms about his neck, she turned reproachful eyes upon her guests. "It is your doing; but for you we should have been safe."

Then they sat awhile in uncomfortable silence, none knowing what to say. And as they sat together thus, Mabel ran in crying,—

"Oh, papa, such a dreadful thing has happened. Mr. Tralen's horse shied at a heap of stones just beyond the Post-office, and threw him upon them. They've picked him up and taken him into the 'Granta,' but he's quite dead. Nurse says his neck is broken."

A moment's awed silence fell upon them. It was so short a time since he had left them full of life and vigour, and now he had gone over to the majority.

Mrs. Forsyth was the first to speak, and she began,—

"Thank —" but her husband put his hand upon her mouth, saying sternly,—

"Don't; the man is dead, and we are free; but once he was my friend. I cannot forget these things."

"I would thank you all as you deserve, if I could—if I could," said Una, tearfully, as she prepared to leave her good friends for her honeymoon trip; "but I don't know how—word—no—so very poor—so you will understand all I am would say and cannot."

Mrs. Stacey, who stood nearest, stooped to kiss her.

"Dear girl, you are happy?"

"Oh, yes; the heat and burden of the day have passed. It is all clear shining now."

"Then we are thanked enough. Heaven bless and keep you glad!"

[THE END.]

## FORTUNE'S MISTAKE.

—:—

### CHAPTER XXI.

"I SHOT Eric; but, Iris, as there is a Heaven above us, I did not mean to kill him."

Such was Lord Carlyon's confession to his wife. It would have horrified many women; it would have made many wives, far nobler creatures than poor Iris, turn from him in loathing dread; but the adventurer's daughter only clung the closer to the man she loved. Her own past we know held some dark secrets, why should she turn from her husband when he needed her most?

Sitting down at Eric's side, Lady Carlyon took his hand in hers. It struck her now that it

burned with fever. She began to understand at last all that had puzzled her in her married life.

"Tell me everything," she pleaded; "Dene, all I ask is that you should trust me."

"I cannot," he said slowly. "I is, you would shrink from me in aversion; and if I lost you I should—kill myself!"

"Hush!" said the woman tenderly, speaking in the soft soothing way in which a mother reasons with her sick child; "nothing in the whole world would make me shrink from you. I am not a good woman, Dene, compared with your sister; I have done things she would count great sins, but I love you dearly, and I think, just because I know what sin and temptation are I shall understand."

A strange sense of sanctity seemed to hallow the little room; in itself it was nothing remarkable, just the plain ordinary sitting-room an hotel affords to such guests as desire a private retreat, the fire burnt brightly in the grate, the soft flickering flame which only wood fires give, lit up the prettily-papered walls, and fell full on the faces of the husband and wife; a shaded lamp stood on the table, and the blinds were drawn. Iris bending over Dene might have been his good angel rather than a woman who was a sinner.

"Tell me," she pleaded; "tell me all!"

"It will do no good." There was no sullenness or anger in his tone, only the quiet sadness of a fixed despair.

"It will do two things," she answered, "it will rob John Hill of his worst weapon; you can listen unmoved to his threats of telling me what I already know from yourself; and, Dene," her voice sank to a whisper, "it may be you have brooded over this till things seemed worse to you than they really are; it will do you all the good in the world to tell the whole story to someone you can trust, and hear their calm, true opinion; and, Dene, whom should you trust if not your wife?"

A long deep silence; Iris had slid the little brass bolt of the door, and so she knew they were secure against all intruders, she had also locked her bedroom-door, so that no one could enter it and become either a passive or wilful eaves-dropper; she and her husband were alone. And Dene's story, shorn of his wife's gentle sympathetic questions and of his own excuses, was a very simple one.

He had started to meet Eric, utterly unconscious his cousin had overheard his conversation with Iris, and so had a cause of complaint against him; he walked on quickly, believing himself late.

At the Mere three paths met, two of them led to Mr. Armstrong's, and, uncertain by which Eric would come, Dene resolved to go no further, but wait for his cousin there.

He turned aside from the Mere to the little copse, not with any thought of hiding himself, but simply because, from the rising ground, he could gain a better view of the passers-by.

To his surprise he saw Lord Carlyon, not advancing to meet him, but standing perfectly still at a little distance, with such an expression of hate and loathing on his face as almost to alarm his cousin.

"Even then," explained Dene slowly, "it never struck me that he knew I cared for you, and it was jealousy which had so changed him. He looked to me, Iris, like a madman; his eyes seemed ready to start out of his head, his face was livid; I never saw anything so terrible to be human and alive."

Iris wiped the drops which had gathered on Dene's brow tenderly away; she had only pity for him. If the remembrance of the scene had power to move him thus, what must the reality have been?

"He walked up and down," went on Dene, "talking to himself and singing little snatches of songs; Iris, I can't describe it to you, it seemed to make my blood grow cold. At last, he was standing almost close to me; he could have put out his hand and touched me, and yet he seemed utterly unconscious of my presence. He suddenly took up his gun—it must have been hidden behind a tree for I had not noticed it before; but when he pointed it at himself, I seemed to know what he was going to do."

"It came on me, like a sudden revelation, that he had heard us—you and me—talking in the library, and meant to kill himself because he had a rival in your love.

"I swear to you I did the best I could. I sprang forward and seized the gun, trying hard to wrest it out of his hand; but, with the fury and strength only seen in mad people, he resisted. We struggled frantically for perhaps five minutes, then the victory seemed mine.

"The gun was in my hand, I felt I had conquered, when, by some accident, which even now I can't explain, I touched the trigger, the gun went off with a loud report, and Eric fell to the ground motionless.

"I heard footsteps in the distance, and, hardly knowing what I did, I dropped the gun, and rushed away from the spot; not two minutes after I met my sister. She had been walking by the Mere, and, alarmed at the report of the gun, was trying to find out whence it had been fired in case anyone needed help. I declared to Fortune it was merely the gun of some member of a shooting-party, out after pheasants.

"I kept with her till she reached the Court, for fear she should mention the matter to anyone, and I contrived that we should go in by the grand entrance, and be seen by all the people gathered in the hall, so that if any question or suspicion arose later on, I could bring several witnesses to prove that I had spent the best part of that terrible afternoon with my sister."

"Dene," his wife's voice had never been so full of tenderness, "my poor boy, what you must have suffered."

"Don't you see," his voice was spent and feeble, as though the effort of confession had been too much for him, "Iris don't you see where I aimed and why I am as much a murderer as Cain! The medical evidence proved Eric died at once. The bullet passed through his heart and killed him instantaneously, but I did not know this; I might have obtained help for him, I might have brought a doctor to the spot and people to carry him home. Instead of that I left him there unaided for. I made no effort to get help for him, indeed I prevented Fortune's going to the spot where he was, and later on, when the people at the Court got anxious, and a search party was suggested, I did my best to delay it."

"But — why?"

Dene covered his face with his hand.

"Because only Eric's life stood between me and wealth; because with him dead I became Lord Carlyon, with an enormous income, instead of a needy clerk; because if Eric recovered I had to see him become your husband. Iris, as Heaven is above us, that gun went off by accident. Indeed, if I had not interfered with him, he was going to shoot himself. Thus much I may urge in my own defence, but knowing I left him there to die makes me feel more truly his murderer than having by accident fired the shot."

"That is morbid," said Iris, gently; "you have the doctor's testimony when poor Eric was brought home, and repeated at the inquest, that death was instantaneous."

"I know; but, Iris, think how fearfully I 'put myself in the wrong'; who but you hearing the story I have just told would judge me innocent."

"If only you had raised an alarm!" she said gravely; "Dene, love, I fear if John Hill does his worst, these months of silence will tell fearfully against you."

"I know; and yet Iris if I had rushed home with the news that I had killed Eric while struggling with him to prevent his shooting himself, who would have believed me?"

Iris shuddered, it was just as Dene had said, no one would have thought Eric Lord Carlyon, young, rich, happy, and beloved, with the whole world before him, likely to commit suicide.

"He wrote a letter," she said slowly, "I found it that night while they were out looking for him; he had heard us that afternoon, and he wrote in a wild incoherent way to say that he left me free, but I should never see him again, he would take his life or yours."

"Have you that letter now?" asked Dene, half eagerly, as though it brought him a ray of

hope to think this mute evidence as to Eric's state of mind might still exist.

"I destroyed it before I became your wife. I felt," she hesitated, "that you and I had both wronged Eric, and that if we were to be happy we must try and banish his sad fate from our thoughts."

"Iris, you must have seen a great deal of him in the last few weeks of his life, did it ever strike you he was strange, peculiar."

"It never struck me he was likely to go mad, he was peculiar. There was a strain of melancholy running through his most joyous moments, and he told me more than once he knew he should never live to be old. I put it down to his Irish blood."

"Irish blood," exclaimed Dene, "had he any?"

"His mother was a Miss O'Floyd; she was descended, he told me, from one of the Irish kings. He said once the blue eyes and black hair which gave his face such a striking appearance were common to her family."

"You know all now," said Dene, slowly. "Fortune suspected me, she never put the charge into words, but she refused to share a penny of the wealth which came to me through Eric's death. She who had clung to me all through my days of poverty, and who, I verily believe, would have shared her last crust with me, forsook me utterly when I became Carlyon of Carlyon."

"There is one thing more," Iris hesitated, but went bravely on feeling there must be no more secrets between them, "John Hill—what is his part in this?"

"He says he saw me shoot Eric; this I doubt, though he is ready to swear to it, but he must have visited the spot and taken a letter from my cousin's pocket; it was addressed to me, and accuses me of robbing him of all he prized. It concludes with the boast that he will yet live to outwit me, since only his death could bring me wealth. I am sure myself, poor fellow, his brain was gone when he wrote that letter, but no doubt in the eyes of a lawyer prejudiced against me it could be made to imply that Eric did fear I should take his life just because it stood between me and wealth. If Hill chooses to publish the letter and his own statement that he saw me fire the shot and watched Eric fall, why I don't believe there's a jury in England would acquit me. I should be convicted of murder to a certainty."

"Dene," she had put one arm round his neck now, and nestled her cheek against his, "what an awful life it must have been for you since. How could you bear to stay on at Carlyon Court?"

"It nearly killed me. I gave orders that the morning room and the library should be altered beyond recognition; but, even when this is done, the whole house for me will be haunted with memories of Eric. I tell you, Iris, when I walked about alone at night I seemed to see his face reflected in every looking-glass beside my own. I seemed to feel him walking up and down the grand staircase at my side."

"You ought never to have stayed there."

"There was business to see to, and I did not want people to take up the notion I was afraid of Carlyon. I shall never enter the Court again willingly while I live."

Iris stroked his bright hair caressingly. How terribly he had altered since the summer evening when she saw him first. Would he ever be his own light-hearted self again?

Something of this she put into words.

Dene shook his head.

"I don't think I shall live long, Iris; the agony of dread is almost more than I can bear. I am utterly and entirely in Hill's power, and—the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. He won't keep my secret a moment longer than suits him."

"We must make it worth his while."

"He said to-day that he knew you—that he was Mr. Belden's secretary for years."

"It is quite true. He stayed with papa till he was arrested for stealing a ring. We have had our ups and downs, Dene; there are shady passages in our lives we didn't want the whole world to know. The first thing Hill did when he came out of prison last summer was to

threaten to tell them to everyone unless we bribed him heavily. I was terribly poor in those days; I had to raise some money on one of Eric's presents. Hill promised me when I gave it to him to go abroad. I have no doubt he was lurking about Carlyon to try and meet Eric and poison his mind against me. John Hill hates me bitterly."

Dene looked into his wife's face.

"Do you mean his is the hatred of rejected love—did he dare to—"

"He wanted to marry me. When I was very young, seventeen, perhaps, John Hill seemed to me a hero of romance."

Dene looked down at her anxiously.

"You have made me tell you my troubles, Iris; but I would gladly have borne them alone."

"I am glad you have told me. I think we can outwit John Hill."

"I don't see how."

"There is only one thing for it, dear—we must disappear."

"Disappear; but even if we could hide from him it would make him so furious he would betray all."

"I don't think so—have you his address?"

"Yes."

"Then, dear, when you and I are safe away we will send him five hundred pounds with a note saying the sum shall come regularly every six months while he holds his tongue."

"A thousand a year!"

"It is worth that to buy your peace."

"It won't buy it—he'll be back in a few weeks."

"Not if we hide ourselves. You must be content to drop your title, Dene. You and I will travel about as plain Mr. and Mrs. Court. We can go to some pleasant continental town, and have every comfort, even luxury; then we can move on to London. In the suburbs people can live peacefully without their neighbours troubling at all about them. We will get as much happiness as we can out of our lives, Dene."

"And you are content?"

"I am content to do anything so that you cheer up and leave off—"

She meant to allude to the excessive drink she believed him to indulge in, but did not like to put her meaning plainer. Dene's answer showed her she had been making a great mistake all along. "You mustn't ask me to give up this, Iris," and he showed her a small morphia injector. "I simply couldn't live without it, it means life and happiness, peace and forgetfulness to me."

Lady Carlyon's mind once made up she acted promptly. Her maid Elizabeth told her John Hill had returned to England, and was then staying in Albert-street. Iris, who was a quick judge of character, felt she could trust the girl, and put the case before her plainly. She and the Earl were going to leave Paris and travel for three months, then, when spring came, they would settle in England. For a time they would drop their rank and live as simple gentlefolks. Did Elizabeth care to remain with her, if so, it must be on the distinct understanding she kept their secret.

"I never did get on with Mrs. Carter, my lady," said Elizabeth. "Jim and I are thinking of getting married at Easter. My father is giving up the shop, and Jim's no taste for that business, so he's thinking of going for a gardener or gentleman's odd man. We'd an idea if we could get into a good family we might make out very comfortable. Jim, he's a good fellow, my lady, and he do hate John Hill like poison. If you and the Earl settle in England as private people, Jim and I'd serve you both faithfully, and there'd be no need even for him to know you were Lord and Lady Carlyon."

Dene was like wax in his wife's hands. He had suffered so terribly by brooding over Eric's death, it was a positive relief to him to have told Iris the story; he was content to leave everything to her, with the result that early in April Mr. and Mrs. Court settled in a pretty little place near Stevenage, which was called Fairlawn, and let furnished for a year on moderate terms. Elizabeth—now Mrs. James Carter—was maid and housekeeper; Jim, whose gardening skill



hardly equalled his virtues, was useful as odd man and general factotum. Two maids and an outdoor man made up the establishment. It was given out that Mr. and Mrs. Court wished for no society on account of the former's delicate health.

For Dene had kept his word, and *not* been able to dispense with the morphia injector. By the time they came to Stevenage, Iris had given up all hope of his mind ever recovering its vigour. She had consulted an English physician at Vienna, who told her his life was only a question of a few months.

"Mr. Court, my dear lady," said the old man, gently, "has suffered some terrible shock. In the prostration which ensued he took to morphia in large quantities. Some constitutions might have stood it, but to his it was certain death. It is almost useless now to attempt to break him of the practice—it is too late to save him from its effects—and the attempt to deprive him of the drug would only cause him untold suffering. The brain is permanently injured, but the body is decaying, too—you will never have the pain of feeling his mind is gone while his body may last fifty years. All you can do is to smooth his last days as you would those of a sick child."

That was what she had come to—the brilliant, reckless creature who had scoffed at love and thought money the chiefest good—the nurse of a prematurely broken-down man, unable to bear her title or enjoy one of the luxuries her position might have given her, and not a little troubled as to what they should do supposing Dene lived after the stock of money he realised before they left Paris was exhausted.

If repentance can blot out a sin, if faith and sorrow can make amends, surely Iris Langley washed out her errors by her devotion to her husband. She never once forgot that she had led Dene into sin, but for her reckless flirtation with him he would never have been forced into rivalry with his cousin and poor Eric might have been alive yet.

On Dene's best days she would talk cheerfully to him of all they would do when he got better, of the bright home they would have in London, and how Fortune should come and stay with them. Iris spent her whole life in ministering to her husband and trying to brighten his waning hours. She knew he could not be with her long, but she never thought of the future when she should be left alone—her whole horizon was bounded by the tenure of that frail life.

The maid Elizabeth was devoted to her, and gladly shared her cares. Jim Carter was stolidly faithful as a Newfoundland dog. One or two enterprising people tried to make the Courts' acquaintance, but one interview with Iris convinced them she had no time for society; while the sight of Mr. Court in his blue spectacles, as she drove him about the country lanes, gave conviction to many that a local rumour was right in asserting the poor gentleman was "not quite right in his head."

And so spring faded into summer; funds began to run low; Iris began to wonder whether she could risk going to London and paying Mr. Dover a visit, for they could not go on much longer without supplies. She knew from Elizabeth's cautious enquiries that George Armstrong still managed everything at Carlyon, the Earl's brief letter announcing he should be away several months and things were to be carried on as usual, having left all power in his hands. Failing any other plan, Dene could sign a cheque for a substantial amount and his wife could cash it at the London Bank into whose keeping Mr. Armstrong paid the rents as he collected them, but she shrank from this step. Iris dreaded nothing so much as a meeting with John Hill, and she seemed to feel that if she was once seen in London he might obtain some clue to Dene's hiding-place.

She came out of her husband's room one June morning with a strangely anxious face. Elizabeth Carter met her on the stairs,—

"I want to speak to you, please, ma'am. May I come into your sitting-room? It's very particular."

She closed the door upon them both, and looked at Iris with a kindly pity on her face.

"My lady," she said, using the title laid aside

since the old Paris days, "you look sadly troubled, but there's a better time coming for you. Jim had a letter from his mother to-day—it was sent on by my father, she doesn't know this address—and she says John Hill—"

Iris interrupted her; seizing the girl's hand, she cried,—

"Don't tell me he's coming here, Elizabeth. I couldn't bear it."

"Take heart, my dear lady! You will never see him again. I don't know what wrong he did you, or why the very sound of his name has always troubled you, but John Hill's dead, my lady. He was buried last week, and I only hope your trouble dies with him."

But she was speaking to deaf ears; the relief had been too great. At the first news of her foe's death, Iris, Countess of Carlyon, had sunk to the ground in a swoon. It meant so much to her—meant that her husband might bear his own true name for the brief remainder of his life—that when death called him the friends of long ago might gather round him to say farewell.

## CHAPTER XXII.

PAUL HARDY stood and looked at the woman he had leved with a strange conflict raging at his heart; very harsh had been his thoughts of Fortune Langley in the months since they parted, but as she knelt there with the winter sunbeams playing round her head, two things forced themselves upon him; this was not the face of a guilty woman, and if she had dismissed him from ambitious motives just because her brother had become a peer of the realm, why Dene's prosperity had done very little for his sister, for never in the old days had he seen her more plainly dressed.

Her small, close-fitting bonnet of black straw had only a simple ribbon round it; her dress was of black serge without the least attempt at trimming. What did it all mean?

Paul Hardy left the church, but something he could not resist made him remain outside it, leaning against the railings. He was there still when Fortune came slowly through the gate. She recognised him, he knew, by the little start she gave, and as he saw her full face he noticed what her kneeling position in church had hidden from him, her dress, whose plainness had so puzzled him, was really a nurse's uniform.

Paul, a born Londoner, who had spent many years in the great city, recognised it at once as the garb of an institution which trained nurses in their duties; and kept a staff of them when competent, to visit the sick poor in their own homes, some of these were ladies, others, respectable women of the upper working class; they were not even called "Sister," and their career, though eminently useful, had none of the pathos and romance which hovers round the hospital nurse. That his beautiful, gifted Fortune should have chosen such a lot, filled him with amazement.

Their eyes met. Did the heart beneath that long, dark, nurse's cloak beat quicker as she remembered how often they had knelt side by side in that very church, and how she had once expected to stand there and repeat the solemn words which should make her Paul's wife? Perhaps, but Fortune had suffered too terribly in the last seven months to betray her feelings.

Her face was perfectly calm, and after that first start of surprise she gave no sign of recognition.

"Fortune!"

For his life he could not have kept back that word. The church stood in the centre of a quiet square, none were passing by, the two were as much alone as though they had been in a deserted country lane.

"Fortune," he repeated, just touching her long black cloak, "what does *this* mean, was it for this you broke my heart?"

"It means that I grew tired of law copying," said the woman slowly. "I was all alone in the world, and so I thought I should like to do something with my life. I am going to be trained

for six months, and then I shall be a parish nurse somewhere in the country."

"But your brother?" asked Paul, thoroughly mystified. "I should have thought it was the last career in the world he would have liked for you."

"Oh! I did not consult Dene; he is travelling abroad with his wife; I have not seen him since," her voice trembled for a minute, "since last September."

Paul Hardy forgot Hildred Fane and the wedding preparations even now going on at Nether-ton Castle; conviction came to him that he had been mistaken, Fortune had some reason for her conduct he had never even guessed.

"Tell me the truth," he said hoarsely; "now that we two are parted for all time, now that nothing can bring back the past, you owe me so much, why did you cast me off?"

"Hush!" said the nurse gravely; "within three days' time you will be married to Hildred Fane, you have no right to speak of the past!"

"I will speak of it," he returned; "I will never let you go until you tell me. I will dog your footsteps until I get the truth. Why did you send me away? I thought it was ambition; as an Earl's sister you could certainly look higher than a struggling author, but I find you poor still, apparently no richer for all your brother's wealth."

Fortune looked into his eyes, and her resolution was taken.

"For the sake of the old days," she said in a sad sweet voice, "I will trust you with my secret. I don't believe you will betray me."

"I will betray nothing."

"The last time we ever talked together in this very spot," she went on wistfully, "you told me I sacrificed too much to Dene; you said, if you remember, that he was not worthy of my love, and that I should live to regret it."

"Yes—but—"

"I cannot tell you much, you must fill in the gaps in my story for yourself. A great danger threatens Dene, some day a terrible shadow will fall on him—and through him on me. I did not choose that you should share it. I could not have married you, leaving you in ignorance of the danger I feared. I dared not tell it to you lest you should be hard on my brother; there was nothing for me to do but to let you go."

"Fortune!"

"Yes," she said simply, as though he had asked her a question. "I loved you always, my heart never wavered in its trust, but I would not run the risk of bringing disgrace upon you; I would not let you feel your wife had brought you a dowry of shame—and so I set you free. At least," and she smiled sadly, "I have not spoilt much of your life—in three months you were consoled."

"Consoled," he cried hoarsely, "when my heart still aches for you, when the sound of your voice has more power to move me than aught on earth, how can you say that I am consoled?"

"You ought to be—you have put another in my place, your love and faith belong to her. When I heard of your engagement I was thankful to think I had not spoilt your future; young, rich, and beautiful, Hildred Fane will be a fit sharer of the fame you must some day win."

"Who told you?"

"My old friend, Chrisie Seymour, is to marry Captain Fane—I was with her when your engagement was first announced."

"Fortune!"

There was a dumb appeal in his voice which well nigh upset her courage, but she kept calm by an effort.

"Let me go now," she said, gently, "after all I am glad I have met you. You won't think quite so hardly of me now, and I—for all time my life will be a lonely one—I should like to feel you have forgiven me."

"Listen," he cried passionately, "you must hear me out. I never forgot you, Fortune, though I thought you had treated me heartlessly. I was true to you, but—there was an accident at Nether-ton, and Hildred was nearly drowned. They said I saved her life, but a dangerous illness followed; it was then, in her delirium,



AT THE FIRST NEWS OF HER Foe's DEATH, IRIS HAD SUNK TO THE GROUND IN A SWOON.

her mother learned the truth—she had given her young, trusting heart to me, who had nothing but cold grey ashes to offer her in return—Fortune I thought you were dead to me, and she loved me, you can guess the rest.”

“You were right,” said the nurse slowly, “Paul I am dead to you; however long I live I shall never marry.”

He looked at her thoughtfully.

“I cannot understand it; what danger can threaten Dene now? You can't mean you think your cousin committed suicide, and that, therefore the curse of insanity is in the family and may come to you.”

“No, I don't mean that.”

“Where is Dene, by the way? I have often searched through fashionable papers for his name. I should have thought he would have revelled in all kinds of amusements, and plunged into every gaudy society could offer.”

“I believe he lived at Carlyon Court till December, and that then he married and went abroad.”

“Whom did he marry?”

“Iris Belden—she had been engaged to Eric. She was a very handsome woman, and Dene admired her from the first.”

They parted, the nurse watched Paul till he was out of sight, and somehow with him seemed to go a part of her life, it was as though she had no power to rejoice or sorrow; as though nothing mattered very much.

Paul Hardy had a grand wedding. The briefness of the engagement made Lord and Lady Fane all the more anxious that every possible ceremony should grace the occasion, lest a rumour should get abroad that they disapproved of Hildred's choice. So invitations for a large house-party were sent out, and fifty guests from the neighbourhood bidden to the wedding reception.

Captain Fane was amongst the first invited, and his uncle and aunt begged him to bring his fiancée, that she might be introduced to Hildred

before the latter started for her long sojourn abroad.

Lady Fane wrote a pretty note to Miss Seymour, begging her to dispense with ceremony and come to them: they wanted so much to know Aylmer's choice.

Christie had no secrets from her lover. She told him the circumstance under which she had formerly known Paul Hardy, and asked whether, remembering these, she had not better stay away from his wedding.

“We are bound to meet Hildred's husband some day,” said Aylmer, thoughtfully, “and I think it would be better to get it over now when everyone at the Castle will be so taken up with the wedding preparations they won't notice any embarrassment in your manner.”

In spite of which Christie was much relieved to find the bridegroom elect in London, when she reached Netherton. It was embarrassing enough that Hildred took a great fancy to her, and insisted on having a long confidential talk with her; but it would have been positive torture to Christie if she had had to watch Paul's courtship, remembering as she did the days when he and Fortune had been lovers.

“I'm so glad you are going to marry Aylmer,” said Miss Fane, affectionately, “I've always declared he would be very nice if he could only fall desperately in love, and you've improved him ever so much already. Then papa and mamma have both taken a fancy to you. It's delightful.”

“I expected you all to look down upon me because I was a dancing mistress,” said Christie.

“We are not snobs,” replied Hildred; “besides Aylmer was such a prig I expected him to marry a female missionary or a Salvation Army captain. I'm so glad he's chosen some one who doesn't think pretty things wicked. When Paul comes back I know you and he will be great friends.”

“I believe that I have met Mr. Hardy already,” said Christie, resolved to take the bull by the horns, “he used to visit some very intimate friends of mine.”

“Do you mean the Langleys?”

There was no help for it. Christie had no idea whether Hildred knew of her lover's former engagement. She could only answer gravely,—

“Yes.”

“Tell me,” said Hildred, hoarsely, “was Fortune Langley very pretty? There are times when I fancy Paul has not quite forgotten her though she did her best to break his heart.”

“I was very fond of Fortune,” said Miss Seymour, slowly; “but I should never describe her as pretty.”

She did not think it necessary to add she regarded Miss Langley as the most beautiful woman she had ever seen.

“Ah,” said Hildred, cheerfully, “you speak in the past tense, so I suppose she threw you over too when her brother became an Earl. Never mind, Christie dear, you are quite grand enough for us.”

It was impossible to refuse the kiss Hildred pressed upon her cheek. It was impossible to be vexed with the bright young heiress; but poor Christie felt a traitor to Fortune as she received the caress, and could almost have found it in her heart to wish Miss Fane had not been so gracious, and when two days later, in the winter sunshine, Hildred and Paul were made man and wife, only one among the brilliant array of guests thought the bridegroom's heart was not in the compact, and wondered whether his thoughts had wandered to his first love.

(To be continued.)

Our Christmas Number will be ready next Tuesday, November 28th, and will contain two complete Tales and the opening chapters of a new serial Story. In addition to this, we are presenting our readers with a handsome chromo-lithographed supplement, entitled, “Good Morning, Sir!” Be sure and secure a copy.





THE BLACK LAWYER, MONSIEUR MIGUEL, EXPLAINS MATTERS.

## LOVE IN A MAZE.

—30—

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## A CONJURING PERFORMANCE.

AND now they were all assembled in the big old drawing-room at The Granary, with a log fire blazing hospitably upon the capacious hearth, and the April sunshine flooding in at one of the mullioned windows, the flame of the fire itself paling in the stronger outside light.

The breakfast was not quite ready, requiring a finishing touch or two.

Servants had been handing round light refreshments, and dowagers in shadowy corners were sipping sherry and nibbling wafers and whispering and wagging their heads together.

Lord Lowwater had been prattling artlessly to Mrs. Douglas Rex about the native charms of Miss Selina J. Spanker; and the Honourable Colin Chepatowe was pointing out to Miss Flossie Larkspur the wedding gifts proper which he and Lowwater had presented to the two brides—a few of the best and choicest of the smaller presents being arranged there on view *pour passer le temps*—when what threatened to be a rather bad quarter of an hour was unexpectedly enlivened and rendered remarkably novel and interesting. For Monsieur Miguel, the black lawyer, had stepped briskly forth into the middle of the room; and immediately there was another black lawyer mirrored faithfully upside down in the gleaming smooth dark floor beneath him.

Everybody, figuratively and literally speaking, “sat up.” Good gracious—could it be possible! Was Monsieur Miguel then actually about to make a speech in the drawing-room, and before the wedding breakfast began too!

What on earth could he have to say at such a time! What a singular proceeding—how amusing, though—what very questionable form! But doubtless it was Santa Rosa Island form; and so who could wonder!

Here Monsieur Miguel, clearing his throat and opening his thick lips, extended a dusky hand to enjoin silence, which indeed at that instant fell upon the numerous company as if the wide room by some magic means had suddenly become an empty room.

Elizabeth Dawson—nay, her pardon must be begged, Mrs. Rudolf De Vere—the elder bride, sat leaning back upon a rather low seat, a picture of still ease and grace in her wondrous shining white wedding-gown, which lay about her chair, in shimmering billowy folds of priceless satin and lace, just where the sunbeams poured in at the mullioned window and streaked with quivering golden shafts the bare polished floor.

Even now she did not lift her veil; had not once raised it since first putting it on.

She knew that people remarked her eccentric behaviour—how indeed could it be otherwise?—noted and whispered of her strange silence; but stilly as Aunt Betty sat there, almost like a marble bride, the heart in her bosom was in a wild tumult, and the fierce and anxious throbbing of it caused her real agony.

Rudolf stood behind her, with a proprietary arm resting around the back of her chair.

He had seen her bend towards Monsieur Miguel, murmur something, merely a few quick words, for the agent's ear alone; and then it was that the black lawyer had appeared so unexpectedly in the centre of the room, by this extraordinary movement astonishing every one and stirring curiosity to the highest pitch.

And Rudolf himself—like every one else present, excepting it may be the other bride, Mrs. Douglas Rex, who was looking radiantly happy and amused—stared wonderingly at the queer black solitary figure, with the thick lips and the rolling merry white eyes, out there in the middle of the crowded Granary drawing-room, and tried hard to conjecture, but in vain, what in the world was coming next.

The Countess of Bearwarden said afterwards that she quite thought there was going to be a

conjuring performance; and—well, after all, it was a very pretty bit of conjuring in its way!

“Kind guests and friends,” began Monsieur Miguel, glibly. “Miss Dawson—dear lady,” with a courtly bow towards the marble bride with the burning heart, “I ask your forgiveness; Mrs. Rudolf De Vere I should have said—has begged me, on this most happy occasion, to speak a few plain words, to tell you a short plain story before we all sit down to the wedding-feast. I take it that you are willing to listen to me, ladies and gentleman! Thank you.

“As doubtless you are all aware, my own dear late friend and master, Oliver Dawson, once lived here at The Granary; and it has been a dream of my life, a dream, thanks to Providence, now fulfilled, to see the old English homestead where he was born and bred.

“Oliver Dawson, in the pursuit of agriculture in England, lost the snug fortune he once possessed. He came out to Santa Rosa Island and turned merchant in native products, and quickly made another—a much larger fortune than that he had owned before. A very great portion of our beautiful small island—I may say nearly the whole of it—in time became his land; and the estate, of course, is now the property of the heirs he left behind him.

“The coming over the sea of Oliver Dawson was not only the means of making his own life, as one may express it; it was the means of making my own, too. I hold a high and honoured position out yonder in Santa Rosa, and I have at home there an estimable wife to look after me. Both of these sound earthly blessings do I owe to Oliver Dawson.

“For my good master brought over with him from England his maiden sister, a spinster gentlewoman of many praiseworthy qualities, and his two little motherless daughters, aged respectively five and seven or thereabout.

The elder of the two children was named Elizabeth, having been christened after the maiden aunt, Miss Elizabeth Dawson; and the

younger was named Susan, she bearing, I believe, the name of her dead mother. But the two little girls, both by their father and their aunt, were always called Betty and Susy.

"The daughters of Oliver Dawson, although so far from England, could not, of course, be suffered to grow up wild and uneducated; but there was no one capable of instructing young children of their position and prospects in our remote Santa Rosa. What was to be done?"

"The captain of a trading-vessel came to us one day—such men often did come and chat and smoke a pipe with us after business hours—and as this sea-captain, a German, was a remarkably pleasant and intelligent man, my master spoke to him of his trouble touching the education of his motherless little daughters.

"I know just the person you want," said the Captain; "at home in Hamburg, and I can answer for it, she'd be glad o' the chance. Fraulein Kapper is not young, but she's strong, and she's accomplished, and she's sensible, and she's cheerful. And, moreover, she's had a good deal of solid experience in the up-bringing of motherless little German girls. She wants to get away from Hamburg and go abroad, and she's not particular where. You say the word, sir, and when I get back I'll start her."

"And that, in short, was how it came about. In due course Fraulein Anna Kapper arrived in Santa Rosa; and a few years later, ladies and gentlemen, Fraulein Kapper became Madame Miguel."

The faces of the "ladies and gentleman," present were in truth something to behold and to study. In a wide silent circle, all decked in their smart attire, the guests, closely packed, were gathered around the little black lawyer—or the conjurer, as Lady Bearwarden had aptly nicknamed him—with wonderment and vague expectation indescribable still stamped upon every feature. What on earth was it all about? What in the world did it all portend?

Verily, it was the queerest marriage-feast on record; and never again could they hope to assist at such another! But the beautiful veiled bride with the trembling heart remained mute and motionless as ever, waiting until their dusky friend should have finished his oration; and Rudolf, her husband, still leaned upon the back of her chair, apparently lost in a maze of odd conjecture.

"Well, the years passed on, kind guests and friends," resumed Monsieur Miguel, cheerfully, "and the youthful daughters of Oliver Dawson grew and thrived apace in the genial climate of our lovely island.

"Under their father's guidance they boated, swam, rode, played tennis; and Madame Miguel trained their minds. She herself let me remark, is a wise and liberal-minded woman; and the reading of novels—good vigorous novels, either in French, German, or English—was by no means a forbidden item in her pupils' education. A vein of romance, either in man or in woman, is not infrequently a possession in life as rich and desirable as that still rarer gift—a vein of humour; and both may be sometimes unconsciously acquired in the study of good wholesome novels. This, however, is Madame Miguel's opinion.

"Oliver Dawson had, by this time, conquered fortune, and was a rich man. When his daughters were old enough to comprehend fully matters of the kind, he spoke to them, in his good kind way, of his advancing age and of their own future.

"Having once possessed money and lost it, and, by sheer pluck and hard industry, won it tenfold back again, he was now keenly alive to the value and the good of it.

"And yet, with all his sound common sense and practical views of life, my master was still old-fashioned and sentimental enough to desire that his daughters should become the wives of good and honest men—men, that is to say, who would not seek and win them for the sake of any riches that might be theirs; and, perhaps, when obtained, squander those hardly-won fortunes they had never earned; but upright, just men, who should love and honour a woman for herself alone.

"An idea crossed the brain of Oliver Dawson, and he determined to carry it out. This idea of

his, it may be, was as old as the hills; but it was none the worse for that. There is nothing new under the sun!

"If Betty and Susy Dawson ever married, they should prove, if necessary, the lovers who came wooing them.

"He sought my help; and I helped him to the best of my power. I drew up two—well, what for convenience sake we will call two sham wills; and a real one.

"The real and right one he kept himself, or rather handed over into my keeping; and the two sham ones he gave to his two daughters: one to Elizabeth, the elder, and the other to Susy, the younger.

"As a matter of course, those documents, though duly signed and properly attested, were merely—as it was intended throughout that they should be—so much utterly worthless paper. By dating and so forth, we had carefully managed it thus.

"But Oliver Dawson impressed upon his daughters that it would be as well if they were to put this fact clean out of memory, and to forget that such a thing as a real and just will for their mutual benefit was all the while safe in the hands of his man of business—I mean myself, my friends, Hans Pedro Jerome Miguel.

"It is only a whim of mine, my dears, my good master said to them—it was, perhaps, a couple of years or so before his death—when he presented in turn to each daughter one of these sham documents I have been telling you about. 'Only an old man's whim, Betty and Susy; and, perhaps, after all, a very foolish one! But when I—when I'm gone, dears, and you return to Europe and to England, so long as you keep these papers in your possession, you will be able, as it were, with a lighter conscience, to mystify and to prove the men who seek you in marriage. I would get the brief contents of these papers by heart, if I were you.

"But, there, dears, you are clever girls, and I leave the game entirely to your wit and discretion. Anyway, no matter how you play it, take my word for it, Betty and Susy, you will be suffered to enjoy but little rest or peace in old England when once it be noised abroad there that you are two handsome young women of considerable wealth. However, as I said before, I leave the playing of the game to your own bright wit. For they had long known that it was their father's especial wish that they should return to their native country when the sad day came—and it could not be far off—which should see them fatherless and alone in the world. Oliver Dawson, having married late in life, was now an old man past seventy.

"Well, it was done in this manner. In the sham will given to the elder child, everything, whether in land or in money or what not, that my master might die possessed of, was bequeathed unconditionally to Elizabeth Dawson; the younger sister thus being left totally unprovided for, and therefore as completely dependent upon the bounty of the elder.

"In the second sham will given likewise to the younger child, things were simply expressed in exactly the reverse way. That is to say, everything, whether in land or in money or what not, that my master might die possessed of was bequeathed unconditionally to Susy Dawson; the elder sister now being left totally unprovided for, and therefore as entirely dependent upon the generosity of the younger.

"At the death of Oliver Dawson, however, some two or three years later, by the real, the true will, which was then opened and acted upon conformably with the simple, straightforward laws of Santa Rosa Island, Elizabeth Dawson and Susan Dawson, co-heiresses of Oliver Dawson, inherited unconditionally something over two hundred and fifty thousand pounds apiece. This from 'personal estate' only, mind you, my friends," added Monsieur Miguel, pleasantly. "There is still the 'real' in the back ground in Santa Rosa Island.

"But, ladies and gentlemen," continued Monsieur Miguel, with a sympathetic roll of his awful white eyes, "I should not forget to mention that more than a year before my dear master himself was called away, Miss Elizabeth Dawson was summoned, rather suddenly, to her last rest; but

it was Miss Elizabeth Dawson the elder, you should comprehend, the amiable spinster gentlewoman of many praiseworthy qualities, the maiden sister of Oliver Dawson, the good old 'Aunt Betty' of her two young nieces—and not Elizabeth Dawson, the younger, Oliver Dawson's elder daughter, as I fear you have for obvious reasons been led, for a considerable time past, to suppose.

"Miss Elizabeth Dawson, the aunt, died of sunstroke; she having somewhat imprudently ventured out upon the seashore, forgetting her sun-hat and puggere, on a broiling midsummer day—it was, in fact, the hottest day of our always hot summer; and it ended fatally for Elizabeth Dawson. And when my dear old master died, he was laid in his last, long sleep by his sister's side."

Here amongst the staring fine company there was unmistakably discernible what the reporters in the newspapers call "sensation."

Colin Chepatowe stuck in his glass and gazed with all his might at the veiled marble bride—lightning thoughts of a certain sandal-wood album and a droll stiff old photograph taken in curious prim head-gear darting through his mind—that photograph with the mild and homely expression of countenance and the nondescript nose and the manifold "gathers" at the waist of her gown—the queer old picture of a spare, middle-aged, respectable-looking body that Susy Dawson, caught unawares one afternoon in the past summer, had brightly and quite naturally called "Aunt Betty!" By Jove, what a move!

Could it be possible—could it be *really* and *truly* possible that—after all—

Colin Chepatowe stared harder than ever at Aunt Betty; at his Aunt Betty—the Elizabeth Dawson whom he had always known; then he gasped—at present it was all he could do—and could think no more coherently for the next half-hour at least.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### TABLEAU I.

And Rudolf De Vere, gazing thoughtfully down at his wife, still sitting there before him with hands locked in her lap, veiled, white, and rigid as a statue, remembered the bitter spite and vehemence of Dr. Gabriel Gaunt, recalled that autumn morning when they had met by chance at the cottage of Tamar Payne. How on that occasion the poor mystified old top had sworn and reiterated in the most violent and apoplectic fashion that the Elizabeth Dawson who had returned from Santa Rosa Island was not, emphatically not, the Elizabeth Dawson who eighteen years before, had gone out thither with her brother Oliver and his young family, at the same time appealing to the aged Tamar Payne to confirm the truth of his—Dr. Gabriel Gaunt's—will as a revelation; how—

But there was Monsieur Miguel once more stretching forth a lean and dusky hand to command attention; and once more the astonished buzzing and whispering ceased instantly, as the little coloured lawyer opened his thick lips to conclude his extraordinary story.

So Rudolf, with the rest of Monsieur Miguel's audience, could only wonder and wait—wonder and wait for the end.

"I shall soon have done, my friends," said Monsieur Miguel then. "I will not keep you many minutes longer. The marriage-feast is awaiting us in another room. Once again, notwithstanding, I must bring under your notice the name of my estimable wife, Madame Miguel. Madame Miguel, you should know, is a woman of fertile imagination and resource.

"The time had now arrived for the Misses Dawson to quit their island home and to start for their travels in Europe and their search for a residence in England; but in this matter a serious difficulty cropped up and presented itself grimly enough—a difficulty somehow or other hitherto completely overlooked.

"How in the world were two beautiful and rich young unmarried women to go wandering about o'er sea and land together—they two alone, without a chaperon!—that conventional guide and



protectress demanded inexorably by society in a domestic situation of the kind? Good gracious! It was impossible.

"But Oliver Dawson's high-spirited daughters hated the idea of such a thing and scouted it."

"The life they had lived in Santa Rosa Island had been so free and so fearless, so healthfully natural and unrestrained, so delightfully untrammelled by any petty conventionalities, that the bare notion of a strange she-dragon religiously and unceasingly keeping guard over their daily movements, watching and weighing their every trivial action, was simply intolerable to the understanding of both Betty and Susy alike."

"There was neither sense nor reason in it. Indeed, they absolutely refused to listen to any suggestion of the kind—they loftily declined to admit that an elderly female companion to accompany them upon their travels was either proper or necessary."

"We will submit to no such hateful encumbrance," they declared rebelliously. "No lynx-eyed she-bogey for us, thank you, if we know it!" cried they, "unless you will consent to come with us and be our bogey, dearest Madame Miguel! It is you, our darling eldest thing, or nobody!"

"They said it and they meant it. What was to be done?"

"Yet, sincerely attached as she was, and still is, to her affectionate old pupils, for Madame Miguel herself to accompany them to Europe in the character of companion and chaperon, now that she was my wife, was of course altogether out of the question. Woman's wit, however, is proverbial!"

"Now, in the island of Santa Rosa, ladies and gentlemen, we are not exactly a community of untamed savages. There are a few English gentlemen scattered here and there, a few superior French folk, a sprinkling of educated Germans, and two or three well-to-do Dutch families. We boast a capital public library—English books and other—a fine mission-house and institute, a savings' bank, schools, churches; and all the natives, I am happy to tell you, are converts to Christianity—no longer eating one another or strangers when they can catch them!"

"At the Governor's house, too, things are very gay and pleasurable in a small snug way during our brief mild winter of seven or eight weeks; and at the Governor's house the daughters of Oliver Dawson were always regarded by everyone as first favourites there; indeed, no party at any time, however important, was considered a success ungraced by their bright presence."

"On a certain memorable evening, in their father's lifetime, they were the leading spirits of some private theatricals, held in honour of the Governor's birthday; and the remarkable cleverness and make-up—the latter effected with surprising ease and rapidity—of Miss Betty Dawson junior, in the part of a volatile yet an elderly spinster, was, I do assure everybody here, the talk of our island society for a long while afterwards."

"When that appalling question of the indispensable sheep-dog suddenly presented itself, Madame Miguel recalled to mind almost as suddenly Miss Betty Dawson's stage-triumph on the Governor's birthday night; and forthwith that admirable woman hatched a little plot. Doubtless it was very wrong of her; but it was indeed Madame Miguel herself who hatched the little plot in question."

"With her keen mental eye she saw a clear way out of their terrible difficulty."

"The rich young Misses Dawson required no sheep-dog whatever—the rich young Misses Dawson might very well take care of themselves."

"Then she put her little plot as plainly as possible before the understanding of her dear young friends—and what did they do? Why, they fell in love with it on the spot. It was just the kind of daring notion to win the immediate favour of Oliver Dawson's high-spirited daughters; for it appealed as it were to the adventuresome and romantic side of their characters."

"Let the younger Elizabeth Dawson—counselled Madame Miguel—be supposed by the world to be sleeping peacefully in her grave in Santa Rosa Island; and let the elder Elizabeth Dawson—

albeit a very different elder Elizabeth Dawson—with an outfit suitable to her years and position, chaperon her young niece to Europe and to England."

"With Elizabeth Dawson's abundant cleverness her innate readiness and wit, nothing could be easier or simpler to work and carry out successfully, Madame Miguel declared."

"Nobody would recognise them, nobody would remember anything at all about them, after an eighteen years' disappearance from their native country; and as it happened luckily, they had now no near kith or kin left upon this wide earth to crop up inconveniently and confront them with unanswerable problems."

"Was it not their good father's great desire that they should try and should prove, if practicable, the men who of a surety would seek them in marriage; and lo! here for Betty Dawson herself, as Madame Miguel pointed out, was a rare opportunity of a double test—because the man who should admire her and love her, and endeavour to win her for his wife, her apparent middle age and lack of dower notwithstanding, would be a knightly lover and right loyal chivalrous husband in truth worth a woman's winning; in truth worth a woman's heart!"

"This, my friends, was Madame Miguel's indulgent and dramatic expedient for securing an absolute freedom of action, an entire absence of the dreaded prim female surveillance, for her beloved old pupils, upon the momentous occasion of their quitting Santa Rosa Island to return to their own native land."

"In adopting this stratagem, argued she, they would be perfectly independent of the whole world around them; and might be fearlessly happy at all times and seasons in their own way; doing whatsoever might please them best, going whithersoever their fancy might lead them; accountable to no she-bogey for their gay girlish caprices; in every direction mistress of themselves and their own movements, until they should elect to surrender sweet liberty to the will of some all-conquering lord and master!"

"That the daughters of Oliver Dawson were to be trusted thoroughly as proud and high-minded young gentlewomen, Madame Miguel well knew; of that she had no fear; but she did not know—how could she foresee it?—that fate in due course would bring them back to Maydew, to the hall owed place of their birth."

"They never dreamed that the dear old homestead down in Westshire might again one day be their own. They thought, not unreasonably, that after so many dead and gone years of chance and change, The Granary was lost to them for ever. And so when that undreamed of opportunity of returning to The Granary, and, better still, of buying up the old farm house and everything without and within belonging to it, so unexpectedly presented itself through the kindness and promptitude of Mr. Rudolf De Vere, the temptation and the longing were too strong, were not to be resisted, and the Misses Dawson determined to brave all probable risks and pitfalls—and you must perceive that in the circumstances such things were likely to exist—and to take up their abode once more in the long-lost home of their childhood. Yes! come what might, resistance was impossible—back they would go to the homestead which had been the roof-tree and the inheritance of their father, grandfather, and great-grandfather before them."

"Betty—Mrs. Rudolf De Vere," abruptly concluded the dusky juggler from over the sea—"step forward now, my dear, will you, and show your wedding guests that I have been telling them only the truth?"

She rose then immediately, and with a dexterous movement of her gowned white hand, she swept the misty veil from her head; and, in the same instant Rudolf, with a deep sharp breath, drew himself erect.

She turned to him her beautiful pale face; her eyes full of an almost agonised fear and entreaty; her trembling lips apart as if she would speak, though no words came from between them.

Gone now were the clustering short soft grey curls and the fine straight iron-grey brows beneath those feathery locks of hair; gone now, too, was the suspicion of crow's-feet about the

lovely clear eyes—vanished were the faint lines and shadows about those delicate tremulous lips.

A young, slender, and beautiful woman of perhaps some five or six-and-twenty years, with a skin of exquisite fairness and gleaming tresses of rich golden-brown hair, stood there before Rudolf De Vere; and the faded Aunt Betty, the middle-aged Elizabeth Dawson whom he had wooed and won, had disappeared, melted as it would seem into thin air!

At first Rudolf, and no wonder, could not speak. So Betty herself, speaking very low, broke the spell.

"Rudolf—my husband—can you ever forgive me!"

For a moment or so he gazed at her in speechless, passionate admiration; then gathered her two chill hands into his, bent over her very tenderly, and kissed her for the first time that day before the gaping crowd—whereby she knew that she was forgiven, and cared for nought else in creation!

Meanwhile the faces of Lady Winterbourne and the Countess of Bearwarden were studies in physiognomy not easy to forget; so indeed, for the matter of that, were the countenances of Lord Lowater and the Honourable Colin Chepstowe; and altogether the scene which followed Monsieur Miguel's juggling entertainment was one, to say the least of it, of singular animation."

In the midst of the uproar—honestly that is the only word for it—two fresh discoveries were presently made. First, that Dr. Gabriel Gaunt, during the unfolding of Monsieur Miguel's strange tale, had been taken mysteriously poorly, had borrowed a dowager's smelling-bottle, and had gone tottering home to Maydew. Secondly, that The Granary butler, having appeared in the drawing-room doorway, was vainly trying to direct attention to himself by announcing for about the seventh time that the wedding breakfast awaited the company."

Colin Chepstowe, glass in eye, came boldly up to Mrs. Rudolf De Vere, and said mournfully in the hearing of everyone,—

"Ah, Betty—perfidious Betty—how could you do it! And it might have been, after all!"

"Never, never, Colin," said she with a happy laugh, as she took her dear lord's arm. "And besides, Colin, do not forget that all is fair in love and war."

And then, a joyous throng, they all marched into the breakfast-room—that is to say, the fine old Granary dining-room, wherein the wedding-breakfast was spread.

That marriage-feast at The Granary was in truth a merry meal, and was long remembered and talked of by everyone who had the luck to be present at it.

But at length the fair sister-brides exchanged their glittering white bridal apparel for more sober and suitable gear; and the travelling carriages came briskly round to the porch; and the thrice-happy pairs drove away from The Granary amid a downright hurricane of rice and old satin shoes; and the guests were of necessity left to the care of the brides' privileged old friend and now deputy-host, Monsieur Hans Pedro Jerome Miguel, the black lawyer; and by-and-by the sun set and the stars came out and the eventful double wedding-day was a thing of the past!

Mr. and Mrs. Rudolf De Vere went to Ireland—to Rathdonnell; and Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Rex went south to Terquay.

After a fortnight, however, they all four met again and joined Monsieur Miguel at Southampton, whence on a glorious mid-April day the party set sail to finish the honeymoon in Santa Rosa Island.

And if the capering natives there had been welcoming back to their own country and kingdom two worshipped Queens and their chosen consorts, they could not have given the daughters of Oliver Dawson a more magnificent and right royal reception!

Rudolf and Betty are living at Monkshood—perhaps the happiest couple on earth; and Doug-

las and Susy dwell together in cloudless content at The Granary. The picturesque old Granary, with its quiet plantations and its lonely fish-pond, is indeed an ideal retreat for the most romantic novelist of his day; and as for *The Pagan Bride*, that famous story, in dramatic form, is proving a greater success even than the novel itself. And how proud is Mrs. Douglas Rex of her husband's glory!

Next year, in all probability—so it is whispered—Mrs. Rudolf De Vere will be made really "Aunt Betty;" and Rudolf himself is looking proudly forward to the birth—so he hopes—of a son and heir.

At the present date the Honourable Colin Chepstowe and his blithe young wife are staying with the De Veres at the old Hall; and Lord and Lady Lowater—she who was once known not a hundred miles from Chicago as Selina J. Spanker—are expected in the autumn on a visit to The Granary.

Still it must not be supposed that there was not much idle talk, much and indefatigable wagging of many malicious tongues, after that historic double wedding-day at Maydew church; that day on which the plain and whole truth of the matter was revealed to the world by means of Monsieur Miguel's conjuring performance. On the contrary, it was "argument for a week, laughter for a month, and a good jest for ever."

But what cared Betty and Susy!

The recognised society journals doubtless made capital of the story; and the lesser and unrecognised of the clan stole it, copied it, dressed it up anew in their own scurrilous language, and in the process besmirched, or at all events tried to do so, the fair fame of the ladies from Santa Rosa Island. But again what recked they!

They were innocent. They were spotless.

By their daring freak they had won triumphantly the men they loved; and what was more glorious still—the men who loved them for themselves alone!

[THE END.]

GYPSIES are particularly superstitious regarding portraits, and it is a rarity to find the portrait of a true Bohemian decorating any art gallery or shop window. They consider it most unlucky to be photographed, and will only consent to have their profiles taken in consideration of receiving, without asking for it, an old shoe-string with which they can bind the spirit of ill-luck certain to pursue the person whose likeness has been reproduced.

CHINESE BABIES.—When a Chinese baby is a month old it is given a name. Its head is also shaved for the first time, a ceremony which is called "munefut," and is made the occasion of great rejoicing in rich families. All the members of the family are present in their holiday attire, and the baby to be shaved is clad in a light red garment. The hair that is removed is wrapped in paper and carefully preserved. After the barber has performed his task, an aged man—who is hired for this purpose and receives a small compensation—lays his head upon the head of the baby and exclaims, "Long may you live!" Then those present sit down to a great feast, of which even the little hero of the day has his share in the shape of a tiny piece of rice-cake, which was donated by his grandmother. All who have made presents to the child are invited to the repast. On this day the infant is presented with a red bed, a low chair of the same colour and a cap on which either gold, silver or copper ornaments representing Buddha, or eight cherubs, or written characters—that signify old age or riches—are placed. Before the child is put into the new bed, however, the father consults a calendar and selects a lucky day. The almanac also informs him which things should be removed from the presence of the child. In one instance it must not touch or see objects made of bamboo during a certain time; in another instance articles made of copper and iron are proscribed. Objects which are denoted as harmful by the calendar are either concealed or taken away.

## THE RECTOR.

—10—

### CHAPTER I.

Dreams, books, are each a world; and books, we know,  
Are a substantial world, both pure and good;  
Round these, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,  
Our pastimes and our happiness will grow.

Wordsworth.

—10—

WHAT need is there to describe Grassmere? Who does not know it, with its half-dozen rustic houses, handful of farms, irregular cluster of cottages, old, time-eaten church, rotting pillory and rusty stocks; its bright silver stream, tall regal trees, green-robed valleys, and heather-covered hills; and, lastly, its ancient, stately Hall and moss-grown Rectory?

Our English rural villages are very much alike, and between Grassmere and any other of the thousand and one English hamlets there was but little or no difference.

Perhaps it might boast—for every village, no matter how small, boasts of something—of its old Hall and of the ancient blood of the people who held it, and in doing so it would not be vaunting without cause, for Chichester Hall was a noble pile, honoured by age and a perfect halo of historic memories.

Artists travelled far and from all corners of the civilised world to gaze ecstatically upon its antique beauties and transfer its left wing, right wing, and its noble *façade* to their bulky sketch-books.

The greatest poet of the day had visited it and made it the scene of one of his greatest songs; and antiquarians, when discussing its age, beauties, and history, were wont to grow eloquent and declare that it was the purest specimen of old English mansions.

With all this to back them the Grassmerians may be excused in looking upon their Hall as the greatest piece of glory in brick and stone under the sun.

The present owner of the Hall, Sir Fielding Chichester, was as proud of the majestic pile as the villagers when dwelt outside its gates.

He loved every inch of it, from vasty cellar to carved chimney-stack, and could have told, had he chosen to do so, its whole history, from the day when Luke Chichester laid the huge foundation-stone with his own hands—which were scarcely cleansed of the blood spent in the late wars of King Charles the Unfortunate—to the present time, when its grim walls and corridors were lightened by crimson damask and statuary, and the sunlight of peaceful happiness shone through its stained windows.

But Sir Fielding Chichester would not have chosen to have told it, for he spoke but little, and then only of his books, for Sir Fielding lived and had his being only in the spacious, gold-domed library of the Hall.

There you could find him almost the whole day through, and very often all night.

There, between four high book-lined walls, the owner of a vast and beautiful estate, the possessor of an ancient name and an enormous county influence, and father of a handsome, noble-hearted son and lovely daughter, spent his life.

It was his world; in no other air save that filled with the odour of Russia leather and time-stained parchment could he breathe freely.

In nothing but the absolute silence of the vast library, with its double doors and thickly-painted windows, could he be at ease; and in no friend—not even in his beloved children—could he find that comfort and companion-ship which the silent record of the mighty dead opened up to him.

Yet let not our readers misunderstand the man. He was no mere bookworm, blindly creeping through the mountain of knowledge; no shrunken student in snuff-stained and neglected attire. No, these almost inevitable consequences of such a life in another man were averted in Sir Fielding Chichester by the old blue blood which kept him, no matter what, in habits a perfect gentleman, even to the tying of his cravat.

Slightly bent, yet still looking tall, with pale face and clear-cut features, keen bright eyes and

lofty forehead, small handed and footed, he could have held his head up in point of aristocratic appearance even with the Charles Chichester whose kingly form shone down from its gilt frame in the picture gallery outside his library door.

With such ancestors it was little wonder that Chudleigh Chichester should be both *distinguished* looking and handsome. He was of rather larger build than Sir Fielding, with fair hair and dark eyes.

That there was a look of firmness about the lower part of his face, and an air of thoughtful determination upon the white forehead were matters of congratulation, considering that the whole care of the estates fell upon his broad shoulders.

Everything was left to Chudleigh, and had been since he was of an age to understand the steward's books and the nature of a landlord's duties.

He was now twenty-three years old, though looking younger, being fair, good looking, as we have said, and heart-free, save for the affection he bore his father, and the great love he poured out on his sister Maud, the belle of the county and the object of Grassmere's adoration.

We have experienced comparatively little difficulty in describing one small portion of the Chichester family, but as our pen writes "Maud" it falters and stops motionless and powerless to describe the vision of beautiful purity which memory calls up. If we may say that her face was a perfect oval, her eyes dark, deep, and as clear and fine as the dew upon a rose, her mouth perfect and bud-like, and her hair a marvellous shower of silken light, how nearer are we to producing sweet Maud Chichester than when we had merely written her musical name!

Maud was nineteen, but as unlike the usual run of girls at that age as it was possible for her to be. Perfectly free from affectation, for she had no female friend to teach it her, without an ounce of vanity, she was as open, as pure, and as noble-minded as only a young girl of blue blood brought up under such circumstances could be.

See her as she enters the breakfast-room one November morning, clad in a dark morning dress of a deep, rich colour, that serves as a foil to her fresh young beauty, her hair brushed from her fair white forehead, and her eyes sparkling with affection as she crosses to the fireplace, against which the tall form of her brother Chudleigh is leaning.

"Up already, Maud!" he exclaimed, taking her in his arms and lifting her up—unnecessarily—for a kiss. "I did not expect you for another half-hour."

"Well, don't look so disappointed, or I will go to bed again," she retorted, with a pout. "Is papa down yet?"

"Yes, in the library," replied Chudleigh. "I have sent to tell him the coffee is on the table, but—"

"I will go," said Maud, and with a light step hurried from the room.

Chudleigh looked after her with a sigh and a sudden cloud across his brow, then he resumed the old attitude—a somewhat despondent one—at the fire.

"Dear Maud, dear Maud," he muttered, "poor Maud—heigh-ho!"

In a few moments the door opened and the beautiful girl re-entered with Sir Fielding Chichester leaning on her arm. In each hand was a book and in the breast of his waistcoat was a folded paper evidently thrust there in a moment of abstraction and forgotten.

"Good-morning, Chud, good-morning," he exclaimed, in the musical voice that had always belonged to the Chichesters with their old Hall and old blood.

"Good-morning, sir," said Chudleigh.

"Maud, my darling, what do you want with me?"

"Breakfast, you know, papa—"

"Ah, ah, dear me, yes," softly replied the baronet, "of course. How stupid of me. I had forgotten. Dear me, here are 'Pliny's Letters' and the last 'Essays of the Didactic Society,' and he looked at the books in his hand. "I-I brought them from the library. Excuse me a moment, Chudleigh, while I take them back," and he moved towards the door.



Maud rose from her seat hastily—she knew that once in the library again all remembrance of the breakfast would have vanished from Sir Fielding's mind.

"Let me take them, papa," she said, and with a kiss she took them from Sir Fielding's reluctant hands.

"Dear me, I had no idea it was snowing," he remarked, walking to the window. "What's the day of the month, Chud?"

"Twenty-sixth, sir," said Chudleigh.

"Twenty-sixth and the 'Scientific Review' not come yet!" exclaimed Sir Fielding, shaking his head, and adding, softly "very late—very late."

"The post has not come in yet," remarked Chudleigh. "I'm afraid Markham has some difficulty in driving."

Markham was the rural postman.

"Why, Chud, why?" asked the baronet, dreamingly.

"The roads are so thick with snow—a foot deep round the Hollow."

"Ah, yes, the snow, dear me, dear me, the snow," murmured Sir Fielding, sinking into his chair by the fire. "Have you been out this morning?"

"Yes, sir," replied Chudleigh, "to see Giles. He is rather behind-hand with his rent. New-born could do nothing with him, so I thought I'd walk over and see into it."

"Dear me," said the baronet, with perfect indifference, "and what does he say, Chud, what does he say?"

"The usual story. Everything gone wrong, crops short, the hay queer, mouth disease, and—oh, every mishap under the sun, of course. I was going to ask you what I am to do."

"My dear Chud, what is the use of asking me?" exclaimed the baronet, with mild surprise, "for you know I never interfere in any way with anything. I assure you I didn't even know that Giles was in arrears. I leave it to you, Chud, I leave it to you."

And the father wheeled his chair round towards the table with the air of having washed his hands of the subject.

The son sighed and his brows wrinkled as he looked at the serene face.

For a moment he was silent, then, drawing his chair towards the table, he balanced his knife thoughtfully, and with his face still troubled, said:—

"You know how sorry I always am to trouble you on business matters, sir, but I'm afraid I must ask you to go over a few things with me after breakfast."

"Yes, yes, after breakfast, dear Chud, after breakfast," repeated Sir Fielding, catching eagerly at the postponement.

The next moment the door opened and Maud re-entered with the letter-bag in her hand.

"Here's the post at last, Chud," she said. "Now, papa, let me see. Here are the papers, your beloved 'Quarterly,' 'The Didactic Report,' and a catalogue from Northern's. Those for you. Chud, here are your letters, and what do you think?—one from Aunt Mildred for me."

Chudleigh looked up with a smile, but not a very interested air, for he had already commenced the perusal of a pile of blue official-looking envelopes, and the baronet took no notice whatever, for he was lost in the contents of the "Quarterly."

For a few minutes there was silence, broken only by the trickling of the coffee into the cups and the occasional play of Chudleigh's knife and fork, but suddenly Maud looked up with a pleased smile upon her beautiful face, and said:—

"Papa, Chud, what do you think?"

Chud threw down his letters at once and looked up all attention.

"Nothing. What do you?"

"Aunt Mildred's coming here and going to bring some one with her."

"Bring some one with her? Who?" asked Chud.

"A companion," answered Maud. "Oh, how delightful. Listen, it's quite romantic,—"

"You remember me telling you of a Captain Lawley, who has been staying in Paris for some months. He is dead, my dear. Is it not shocking? He was shot in some wicked duel or other, and

has left his daughter Carlotta, the beautiful girl I wrote to you about you remember, an orphan on the wide, wide world. Poor girl. She is so charming, so very charming, my dear Maud. You will be delighted with her." Dear Aunt Mildred. She rather puzzled me, Chud, but a postscript explains it. 'We are coming over to England at once, as Paris is a painful locality, of course, for dear Carlotta. You have no idea how bravely she bears everything, for Captain Lawley left her penniless, and I had a hard struggle in persuading her from going into the world as a governess. Dreadful, is it not, my dear Maud? However, everything is settled now, and she is coming with me as my companion. We expect to reach London by the first of December, so that if you will kindly ask Chud to have the goodness to see to the cottage—'

"First of December!" exclaimed Chudleigh, quickly. "Phew! Just like Aunt Mildred. How on earth am I to get the cottage ready in a week?" and he rose from the table and walked to the window thoughtfully.

He could see the little cottage which his Aunt Mildred had occupied since her husband, Sir Wilford Gordon, had died; indeed from where he stood he could scan the whole village and most of the outlying houses—from the deserted Rectory, an old moss-grown mansion, tenantless for years, with a history mysterious and gloomy, to the great red-bricked monstrosity which a self-made Manchester man had erected on the borders of the Chichester Park.

Lady Mildred's cottage, a pretty, rustic little box, just suited to her means, which were not very abundant, was about a quarter of an hour's walk from the Hall, and on a level with the dreary Rectory, surrounded by its belt of thickly-planted trees, which seemed to overshadow the little church and all round it like an army of giants with weird arms and clenched hands.

"I must ride over to Armisthorpe at once," said Chudleigh, returning to the table.

"Oh, yes, do, Chud," exclaimed Maud. "We must have the cottage ready for Aunt Mildred. Isn't it delightful, a companion, and such a charming one? I am sure I shall like her if she is anything half so nice as aunt describes her. Poor girl. Think, papa! her father killed in a duel and she left in a strange country without any money or friends excepting aunt. Oh, my heart is wrong for her! If she will let me, I will love her—that I will. Chud, you will make the cottage very nice, will you not—very nice; Oh, Chud, let me come over to Armisthorpe with you; I can help you—oh, I'm sure I can. I can choose different things, and—Oh, Chud, what is the matter?"

For Chud, who had been reading a letter in his hand, had suddenly started to his feet with an exclamation, whether of surprise or anxiety it was difficult to say.

"Eh, what's the matter, Chud?" asked Sir Fielding, glancing up from his "Quarterly."

"What's the matter?"

"N—nothing, sir," said Chudleigh, sitting down again and placing the letter in his pocket.

"Now, Maud, you want to go with me to Armisthorpe, so you shall go and get ready. I don't see how the cottage is to be prepared in time for Lady Mildred. Let me see—the twenty-sixth—no, I don't think it can be done."

"Then," said Maud, eagerly, "let us have them here, papa."

"Of course, if your aunt will come, my dear," said Sir Fielding. "Of course, of course!"

"I will write at once," said Maud. "Now, Chud, you need not be in such a hurry about the cottage, the longer the better. Another cup of coffee before I go, papa? Chud—"

"No more, my darling," said Sir Fielding, and Chud had risen and walked to the window again.

So, holding the welcome letter in her hand, the beautiful girl ran from the room.

Chudleigh walked to the door, and held the handle.

Sir Fielding looked up and actually shuffled in his chair.

"Well, Chud," he commenced, thinking it best to make a virtue of necessity, "you want to go over something with me, eh? I don't know what for, I am sure, for if it's anything of a muddle it

will be twenty times more muddled if I have anything to do with it. Figures, my dear Chud, were never my forte—never," and the baronet shook his head with mild emphasis.

His son came up to his chair, and, leaning over him, put his hand upon his shoulder.

The baronet looked up with apprehensive astonishment, for Chudleigh was not usually demonstrative, and there was a meaning in his half-caressing grasp.

"What is it, Chud?" he said.

"Bad news, sir," replied Chudleigh, gravely, taking the letter from his pocket and holding it out to his father. "Will you read that, sir?"

"No, no; you read—you tell me, Chud. Oh, from Norton and Read it seems by the look of it, and I never can read lawyers' writing. Tell me what is in it," said Sir Fielding, passing his white hand across his smooth forehead with a weary gesture.

Chudleigh opened the letter.

"There is not much to tell, sir," he said, gravely. "Norton has received notice that Mr. Hassell intends foreclosing the mortgage."

Sir Fielding Chichester started, and his hand dropped from his forehead.

"What!" he said, breathlessly. "Give me the letter."

Chudleigh gave it him.

"Norton writes as if there were no loophole left, and does not forget to remind you that the estate, having deteriorated, is not worth the sum advanced. I—I—"

Sir Fielding, who had not been listening to him, dropped the letter from his hand and staggered to his feet.

"Chud!" he said, drawing a long breath, "we are ruined!" and, uttering a groan, he leant his arm on the mantelpiece and buried his face in it.

The son said nothing, but the twitching of the lip and sudden pallor proclaimed how great a struggle the calmness cost him.

There was a dead silence, in which the ticking of the antique bronze timepiece with its figure of the inexorable Father crushing down the minutes with a sweep of his deadly scythe, sounded harsh and foreboding.

Suddenly a burst of music floated into the room and a girl's clear voice rang out joyfully from the room above in some simple ballad.

The father started as if he had been struck—the brother hid his face in his hands and groaned.

"Oh, Heaven—my Maud, my Maud!" breathed Sir Fielding, all the books in his heart turned out to make place for his darling. "My poor child! Chud, what shall we do?"

"Ay, what shall we do? that is the question," said Chudleigh, catching eagerly at the escape from the dread apathetic despair and drawing himself up to his full height. "Bear up, sir; all is not lost yet. Surely there is someone—"

Sir Fielding raised his head, staring Chudleigh at the sight of his face, which looked ten years older than when he had seen it last.

"Someone! ay, but where? No, no, Chud; I have no friends now. I have been living out of the world for nearly twenty years. Once," and he walked to the window, Chudleigh following him—"once," raising his hand and pointing for a second at the tall, crumbling chimneys of the Rectory, "there would have been a refuge, for no Durant ever closed his hand against a Chichester, nor a Chichester ever denied a Durant. But," and he sighed with a world of mournfulness, "where is Durant now? No Chudleigh, that was our only chance; but you know how utterly that is lost to us."

And once more the baronet, gazing at the deserted house, sighed wearily and with utter hopelessness.

## CHAPTER II.

Grace was in all her steps, heaven in her eye,  
In every gesture dignity and love.

Milton.

THE first of December had arrived, and with it Lady Mildred, covered in furs, and accompanied by her friend and companion, Carlotta Lawley.

Chudleigh had been compelled to go to town the preceding day to see the family solicitor, and

had not returned when her ladyship arrived, so that Sir Fielding and Maud did the honours of the house—Maud with some little shyness and reserve, for Miss Lawley had taken her by surprise. She had expected to see a beautiful and accomplished girl from her aunt's purposely obscure description, but the portrait her imagination had drawn fell so far short of the reality that she was startled and surprised.

To say that Carlotta Lawley was beautiful was to assert but little. She was more proud and more bewitching than charming. Taller than Maud, a brilliant brunette, with dark, piercing eyes that shone like a jewel, or a gipsy's—a graceful form, almost queenly in its bearing, and a mouth that rivalled Cleopatra's in its coral-like curves and fullness—she was indeed what the best Parisian judges of women's looks had called her—superb.

Beside Maud's fresh, fair loveliness her beauty shone to its greatest advantage, and Sir Fielding, who came from his dream-world with all the Chichester courtesies to welcome her, muttered a half-audible note of admiration, which it was well for Carlotta's vanity did not reach her ear.

She was very quiet, naturally, thought Maud, but expressed her admiration of the grand old house with such fervour as to win Sir Fielding's and Maud's love immediately.

Said Maud, stopping before an open door through which a small sitting-room could be seen:

"These rooms are Chudleigh's. Oh, I forgot to tell you," she exclaimed, in answer to the look of interrogation on Carlotta's face. "Chudleigh is my brother. He is so good—so kind. We all of us lean on him. Papa is—very busy in the library, you know, always, and everything is left to Chud. And everything fares well too. Oh, you must like Chudleigh."

"I am sure I shall if he resembles you in the slightest," murmured Carlotta, kissing her again.

"He went to London on business yesterday, but he will be back to dinner, I hope. You must let him take you all over the Hall—I mean in the the closed-up rooms, you know. He can tell you the history of every room."

"If he will take so much trouble I shall only be too grateful," said Carlotta. "I am fond of old houses and their histories."

"And now you must come and see my room," she said, winding her arm round her new friend's waist, and leading her into the little rose-coloured boudoir and bed-chamber, which was honoured by the title "Miss Maud's." "Do you like them? If you do you shall have them while you stay. And I wish that might be for ever."

"Do you?" said Carlotta, leaning down with a sudden moisture in her dark eyes, her voice ringing tremulously musical—more musical than Maud had ever heard or thought it possible for a voice to be.

"So do I! How very kind you are! You must forgive me if I seem somewhat cold; until I knew Lady Mildred I never experienced such goodness."

And the lips quivered slightly, although the eyes lit up with a mournful smile.

Maud drew her closer to her.

"You must not say such things; I am not kind. It seems so ridiculous to hear you say that to me." And she laughed merrily as she glanced at the grand beauty of the other, against which she looked so fresh and childlike. "It's you who must be good to me. You will try and love me, won't you? I love you already."

Again the dark eyes filled with tears, but the lips said nothing as she stooped to kiss her.

"And now you must rest after your journey. See, I will make up the fire and cover you up with these furs. Then, while I go and see whether Aunt Mildred is comfortable, you can have a quiet sleep."

Carlotta Lawley laughed a low musical laugh.

"Sleep!" she said. "I could not. I am not tired. You do not know how much I have travelled in my short life, or you would not think me worn out by a short trip from Paris. I once journeyed from Siberia, night and day and had but six hours' sleep the whole time."

Maud gazed at her with rigid awe.

"Siberia! Oh, dear me! what a great deal you will have to tell me!" she said, with a quiet delight; but added, suddenly, "but perhaps you won't tell me."

"Yes, I will tell you everything," replied Carlotta, "nearly everything."

Meanwhile Lady Mildred—a good-natured lady, loved and respected by all, who bore about her the Chichester characteristics in features and manner—was narrating to her brother the history—or, rather, what little she knew of it—of Carlotta and her father, Captain Lawley.

Womanlike, she, of course, commenced the conversation by asking Sir Fielding what he thought of her new companion.

"She is majestic," he said, "Oriental in her beauty. What a woman her mother must have been! Who was she?"

"No one knows," said Lady Mildred. "Captain Lawley had been a widower for years, so it is said. He was a strange man, Fielding, such a very strange man—very handsome. Carlotta has her father's eyes and his hair too."

"And what was he?" said Sir Fielding.

"Ah, that too no one knows. He had travelled a great deal. He had been to—oh, I don't know where—every country you can mention. He could speak every language on the face of the earth, I think. I have heard him scold an Arab who used to bring us flowers in Paris in pure Arabic."

"Eh, how do you know it was pure?" asked Sir Fielding, with a quiet smile, not half attending to her.

"Oh—ahem!—how absurd, Fielding! How do I know it was pure? Why, how could the man have understood him if it hadn't been? Ah, he was a strange character! So gentlemanly, he looked a lord; but—well, very wild, I think. There were stories about a Russian princess, an escapade at court, and a dismissal; but people will talk, you know, and tell such stories too. Anyway, everybody said that something had happened in some court or other, and that Captain Lawley was a ruined man. I never will believe he was an adventurer. No one who could bow as he did could be an adventurer."

"Ahem!" said Sir Fielding. "And what about the duel?"

"Ah, was not that sad?" said Lady Mildred, throwing up her hands. "Ah, it was dreadful! I don't know what it was about—never could find out. Some said it was a gambling affair; but there again, you see, reports are so untrue. Poor Captain Lawley! I'm sure I was as grieved as if he'd been my own brother when they told me he was shot through the breast—through the heart, Fielding—think of that!"

"And this poor girl is utterly penniless," said Sir Fielding, "eh, utterly penniless, didn't you say? I heard it from Chud, I think."

"Hasn't a penny in the world. Shocking, is it not, with such doubtful antecedents and no fortune? Poor Carlotta!"

Then the conversation ended by Sir Fielding getting up in an abstracted manner and walking dreamily out of the room, of course in the direction of the library. Lady Mildred, who was too used to her brother's queer ways to be offended, then sought her dressing-room.

Two hours afterwards the four met in the oaken dining-room.

Chudleigh had not arrived, and Sir Fielding as he stood at the head of the table, pulled out his watch with an anxious look.

"Chudleigh is late," he said. "Had he any commission from you, Maud?"

"No," said Maud, from where she was sitting beside Carlotta, who was dressed in deep mourning that set off her clear skin to perfection. "No: he said he should not have time to do more than buy some books for you at Chester's, papa."

"Ah, ah," said Sir Fielding, sighing, "I'm afraid he hasn't been able to get the books. They were very scarce. An old copy of 'Marcus Aurelius' and a marginal 'Ovid,' my dear Miss Lawley, a marginal 'Ovid!'"

"That must be very scarce," said Carlotta, quietly. "I have only seen one, and that was at Lorenzo Bardolphus's."

"Eh," exclaimed Sir Fielding, eagerly. "Have you been over Lorenzo's library?"

"Yes," she said simply, "I have spent days there."

"Dear me, dear me," said Sir Fielding, forgetting the soup that had just been brought in, and Lady Mildred's plate which was being held beside him.

"I envy you, I envy you. Lorenzo Bardolphus's library, and you saw the 'Ovid.' Perhaps you saw that old tractate of Gregory's. I heard he had a copy."

"My dear Carlotta, don't say a word more," interrupted Lady Mildred, "or I shall never get any soup."

Maud laughed.

"Soup! Dear me, yes," said Sir Fielding.

"You will tell me about Lorenzo's after dinner, will you not Miss Lawley? After dinner! Yes, yes."

Before Carlotta's "Yes" had died upon her lips, the door opened and Chudleigh entered. He started at seeing the beautiful girl at his sister's side; for, like every one else, her almost supernatural loveliness took him by surprise. And she, Carlotta, was, on her side, somewhat startled; for, from Maud's description, she had drawn for herself the description of a little, undersized man, rather poor looking, very business-like, and wholly unprepossessing. Whereas Chudleigh Chichester, as he stood in evening dress, with the glow of exercise upon his handsome face, looked none of these.

Sir Fielding looked up anxiously, trying to read if he could, his tidings from his face. Then, discovering nothing, and smothering a sigh, he introduced him to Carlotta, Maud making room for her brother between them.

"I didn't hear you come in, Chud," said Sir Fielding.

"I walked up the avenue," said Chud. Then turning to Carlotta he added: "You have had a cold and wearisome journey?"

"A little," she said, answering the kindly regard of his great, honest eyes, in which still lingered a touch of his first admiring surprise—"a little; we were well wrapped up, were we not, Lady Mildred?"

"Yes, my dear," said Lady Mildred, "and well taken care of too, for a gentleman, very good-looking, was exceedingly attentive, and insisted on converting Carlotta and myself into respectable mummies, with waterproofs and shawls, besides bringing us hot soup and coffee every five minutes. Of course, Martha was too ill to move."

Martha was Lady Mildred's maid.

"A right courteous gentleman. Do you know his name?"

"We did hear it; but I have forgotten it," said her ladyship. "Do you remember, Carlotta?"

"No, I do not. I heard someone address him as the Honourable Mr. something, and that was all. He was very kind."

Chudleigh looked round from his soup at the pale, grand face, and wondered how, under the circumstances, anyone could be otherwise.

"Let me send you some snipe, Miss Lawley," said Sir Fielding, glancing at her empty plate.

But she declined.

"You are eating nothing," said Maud, with loving reproach.

"You are tired," said Chudleigh; "let me give you some wine," and he poured out a glass of port.

"I do not wonder at her being worn out. She would not lie down even for half an hour, aunt. It was very wrong, was it not?" said Maud.

"Carlotta is very young," said Lady Mildred, "and can afford to be extravagant with her energy. When she gets to my age—"

"My dear Mildred," expostulated Sir Fielding, in so comically courteous a tone that all laughed, even Carlotta; and Chudleigh, in whose ears her voice had been ringing since she had first spoken, drank in the low, rippling laughter as one listening to some marvellous music.

A spell seemed to fall over him when she spoke, and, towards the close of the dinner, he was startled to find himself setting traps to catch her speech, and listening with rapt attention to her low replies.

"Now, Chud and I will have one little bottle"



said Sir Fielding, "and then join you in the drawing-room. I must send you to bed early to-night, Miss Lawley, but after to-day you shall do as you like. Chichester Hall is Liberty Hall—eh, Aunt Mildred! Liberty Hall, eh?" and the old baronet rubbed his white hands agreeably. "Now, Chud, what of the night," he said anxiously, as soon as the door had closed on the ladies and the old butler had disappeared.

"Black, sir," he said. "Norton says that for the present nothing can be done, but he is keeping a careful look-out for a fresh mortgagee, although he fears the estate must be sold."

Sir Fielding groaned.

"My poor Chud!" he said. "This is hard for you—very hard."

Chudleigh smiled bravely.

"I can bear it, sir," he said; then, with a touch of pride: "We, Chichesters, sir, are not used to give in easily. I am not an idiot, I hope, and can make my way. As for Maud—there is her mother's fortune."

"A mere pittance, Chud, a mere pittance," said Sir Fielding, in a dry voice.

"Five hundred a year, sir," replied Chudleigh, suppressing a sigh and speaking cheerily. "Five hundred a year is not to be lamented over."

Sir Fielding sighed deeply, and his eyes filled with tears.

"Maud Chichester with five hundred a year, and the heir to Chichester Hall working for his daily bread!" he breathed.

"A million others, more deserving men, do, sir," said Chudleigh, eagerly, his face flushing and his hand unconsciously clasping the thin claret glass until the stem snapped. Then he continued, more quietly and with great feeling: "Think of yourself, sir; you will suffer most. You are not young, not strong, sir, as we are. Your books—"

Sir Fielding winced.

"Think of myself!" he said, in a tone of self-reproach and with a twitching of the lips; "I have been thinking of myself too long, Chud. I might have repaired the hole in the wall if I had buckled to it in earnest. The estate is a large one, and, like a mine, would pay well if it were properly worked. I might at least have made the old Hall safe for you, Chud; but I have been living a dream-life all these years, shut up like an anchorite between four walls of books—and, oh, Chud, Chud! though I know it is selfish, I feel the coming loss of my books almost as much as anything."

And the poor man, so great a student of the great past, so ignorant a novice of the present, bent his face in his hands and groaned again.

Chudleigh's eyes burned, and he felt choking, but he looked positively stern, as, struggling with might and main, to suppress his emotion, he said,—

"Bear up, sir, for Heaven's sake, bear up! We will save the books at all cost. Come, sir, to the drawing-room. Of course the women must not know a word of this."

"Not a word," said Sir Fielding, and, taking the strong arm held out to him, father and son walked into the drawing-room.

### CHAPTER III.

There stands the house in solemn gloom,  
Black as the night and dismal as the tomb.

"MAUD, I am trying to persuade Miss Lawley to accompany me to the village. It is bright overhead, crisp under foot, and not too cold."

"I have offered to play showman to all the dead brick-and-mortar lions, and see that she does not take cold; but still she hesitates. Can you throw in a word to weigh down the balance?"

So said Chudleigh, leaning against the balustrade in the great Hall, clad in rich garments of seal and Cheviot; and as he spoke he looked up smilingly to where Maud was standing, then at Carlotta, who, book in hand, stood at the open door of the drawing-room.

"Liberty Hall, Liberty Hall!" said Maud, her soft, bright face lit up with a smile. "You can trust yourself to his guidance, Carlotta, if you

care to go. He is very safe, and will not let you slip."

"I am not afraid of slipping," replied Carlotta, quietly; "but," she continued, with a smile, "shall I not be troubling you?"

"I have won," said Chudleigh, eagerly. "If that is your only objection you can go and get your bonnet at once. But—don't let me take you away from your book by force," he said, suddenly, a doubt seizing him whether she really cared to go or not.

"I should like to go very much, if I should not trouble you."

So they went, walking side by side down the avenue and across the park into the clear, frost-bound road that led to the village.

"Now for the lions," said Chudleigh. "You see that red house on the hill there? Guess what it is."

"I cannot," she said. "It is very ugly. The workhouse?"

Chudleigh laughed.

"Oh, capital," he said, enjoyingly. "I must tell that to Sir Fielding. He will love you to the end of his days. That is Gregson's folly, built by a Manchester millionaire named Gregson. His grounds border upon the park; but we see very little of the family, as my father has taken umbrage at the close proximity of Gregson's palatial dwelling-place."

"A millionaire?" said Carlotta, gazing, as it seemed to her companion, with renewed interest at the ugly monstrosity.

"Ay, a millionaire," said Chudleigh, with a touch of sadness in his deep voice. "It is a grand title, is it not?"

"Yes," she said, and to his surprise, a deep gravity came into her voice and eyes. "Yes; wealth is the grandest thing in this world."

For a moment he was too astonished to reply. He found it difficult to believe that the sweet pure lips could have uttered such an assertion; then he said, earnestly,—

"I do not think so. And—you will pardon me—I am astonished to hear you say so. Ah, you were sarcastic."

"No, I was not," she said, simply. "You have never been acquainted with poverty; I have. A lion in a story book and face to face in a huge forest are two different things."

He looked at her, and would have replied, but a something about her lips stopped him.

"Has he any children?" she said.

"Yes, two daughters and a son," said Chudleigh. "We don't know much of them, because Sir Fielding will not visit them. I meet the Gregsons, father and son, in parochial affairs occasionally, and Maud is on speaking terms with the ladies. Indeed, she rather likes them, and would have been glad to have accepted their invitations, but my father is stern, and his decrees are as unalterable as were those of the Medes and Persians."

"There is the barrier of Caste betwixt the Hall and the Folly," said Carlotta, dreamily.

"That is it," said Chudleigh, with a smile.

"But it is a barrier not of my building, remember."

"That is a pretty cottage," said Carlotta, as they entered a little lane, whose frosted hedges and bare thick-boughed trees gave promise of a verdant avenue in summer time.

"You like it?" he said eagerly. "That is your future home!"

"Lady Mildred's!" she said, the colour rising to her face.

"Yes," he said. "It is very beautiful in the summer. The river runs at the back, an orchard stands at its side, and there is a croquet lawn unrivalled in the county."

"You have pictured an Eden," she said, smiling.

"It is; at least to me," he said. "I spend—that is to say, I used to spend," he put in quickly and the girl flushed slightly at the addendum, "most of my time here. There is a little boat-house at the end of the garden, where many treasures of mine in the shape of angling, shooting, and skating lie hidden. Are you fond of boating?"

"I don't know what to answer," she said.

"My experience of boating is un-English. I only know the gondola of Venice."

"Venice!" said Chudleigh. "You have added another story to the edifice of envy. I do envy you. You seem to have travelled—all over the globe."

"You would not," she said gravely, "if you knew all. What is that little Gothic place there?"

"Our curate's; that is the steeple of the old church you see in the hollow there. We have no rector, you know—or, rather, of course you don't. The curate holds a sort of perpetual appointment. He's a very capital little fellow, does his work well, and is respected and liked from one end of the parish to the other. His name is Hawes, Stephen Hawes. There he is," and Chudleigh raised his hat as a short, fair-haired young man, dressed in the usual ecclesiastical long coat and high waistcoat emerged from the doorway of a cottage.

Then they walked on towards a dark-looking piece of woodland, until they reached a broken moss-eaten gate, which barred a path weed-grown and untrodden.

Holding it open for Carlotta, Chudleigh said: "We are going to the old Rectory."

"A rectory here!" she said; "how deserted and unclerical it looks."

Chudleigh did not reply, and they traversed a long, winding path as solitary and overgrown as the piece at the gate for some distance, the trees growing thicker and more wild looking, when a sudden turn brought them to a large square that had once been a lawn but was now nothing but a wilderness of long rank grass, and Carlotta, looking up, saw facing her a huge, straggling mansion of ancient architecture and bearing on its every side some sign of decay and neglect. Its time-eaten walls, down which the damp had drawn long green wrinkles, its black, dust-obscured windows, broken gables and rotting stonework filled her with nameless awe and dread, and her voice insensibly quivered and grew hushed as she said:

"And this is the Rectory?"

"Yes, this is the Rectory," replied Chudleigh, with slow gravity. "It is a grand old ruin, is it not?"

"Yes, grand and awful," she replied dreamily, gazing at the forsaken pile with thoughtful eyes.

"You could scarcely imagine this house alight and alive with warmth and colour, wealth and prosperity, only twelve years back, can you?"

"No," she said, simply, "the windows look as if no human face had ever gazed through them, the steps as if they had never been trodden upon, and this grass plot I cannot imagine has ever been anything but the soul-stirring piece of wilderness it is."

"And yet only twelve years back the Rectory for life and merriment could outshine any house in the county. There is a history attached to it. Would you like to hear an outline while we walk round?"

"I am eager to hear anything respecting it," she said, and her large dark eyes lit up curiously.

"Once upon a time, then, you must know that the Durants—singular name isn't it?—strangers always call it 'Durrant'—it is Du rant the 'Du' long—were amongst the mightiest people of this part of the land. They were of very ancient lineage, but without titles, for they invariably refused them, of enormous wealth, and great popularity. The land you see round this deserted place had belonged to them as long as anyone could remember, how long no one could find out, though many an antiquary had pored over parchment and black letter in his endeavours to do so. We Chichesters, though priding ourselves on our old name, are mushrooms compared to the Durants. No, I was wrong in saying that they had no title, for they always had one in the family, and that was Reverend. The son, generally the eldest in each generation, held the living of Grassmere, and since the old church has been built it has owned no rectors save that of Durant. Don't be alarmed; I am not going to take you back to the first Durant and downward, with a history attached to each. I am only going to tell you how this old place came to be deserted."

"You must know, then, that the present owner

is a certain Maurice Durant, who disappeared twelve years ago, and has never been heard of since. His father, Gerald Durant, was a school-fellow and firm friend of my father, though totally unlike him, having no taste for books or study, and being rather given to hard riding, hard drinking, and fast spending. Still, however, they were great friends, and I don't believe that Sir Fielding has ever known another man whom he could place upon a similar footing.

"Gerald Durant married ten years before my father and had one son, this Maurice mentioned, of whom he was worthily proud. His love for him was a passion partaking of the fearful in its intensity, so they say, and 'Gerald's Boy' was a bye-word in the county. Nothing was good enough for him. No extravagance was sufficiently prodigal to meet his wishes. Nothing Maurice desired, if it was on earth and procurable at any cost, did his father deny him. The result you can imagine. Maurice grew into manhood with the pride of a king and the hauteur of a Spanish hidalgo. He was sent to college, and there, to the almost unutterable delight of his father, he took honours and holy orders. He came of age. The whole village was decorated. Twelve oxen were roasted whole. A flock of sheep and several thousand pounds were given to the poor, and a grand ball distinguished by a princely magnificence was held at the Hall, at which gathered the *élite* of the county and a host of the best blood from the Court, all in honour of Maurice. Then came the time when he grew restless. He must travel.

"Gerald Durant, for the first time in his life, gave a reluctant consent, but consent still. A tutor and companion was obtained, and the parting which nearly broke the old man's heart, took place.

"Maurice started for the continent. For six months letters came from him with tolerable regularity. At the end of that time they grew few and far between. The father looked wan and anxious—more wan and anxious when they ceased altogether, and no messenger or inquiry could discover the whereabouts or track of the missing son—for it had come to that. Maurice Durant had deserted his tutor and servants one moonlight night in some German village, and had flown, leaving no sign behind.

"Then the father's heart grew harder. His hand was closed against the poor and his house against his friends. He shut himself up in this dreary place, refused all offers of consolation and comfort, and waited for the end.

"It came.

"One bleak March night a horseman rode up the avenue along which we have just walked, and, dripping with the rain, his hair blown across his face by the wind, demanded to see Gerald Durant.

"He was refused admittance. It was Gerald Durant's order that no stranger should pass the threshold of the Rectory. The horseman thrust a letter into the servant's hand and bade him bear it to his master, saying it contained tidings of his son. The servant took it to the dim, ghastly room, lined with faded tapestry and dusty books, in which the old man spent his few remaining days this side of eternity, and then retired. An hour afterwards, fancying he heard a noise, he returned, and found his master stretched across the table—dead. The contents of the letter no one ever knew, for all that remained of it was a little heap of ashes in the grate, and the horseman had vanished as suddenly and mysteriously as he had appeared.

"That is the history of the Rectory, as I have heard it a hundred times. Miss Lawley, you are quite pale, and, surely, not weeping? How thoughtless of me. I might have known that the cheerless place and the story would have affected you. Pray—"

And with self-reproachful eagerness he seized her arm.

"Forgive me! I am very foolish," she said; "but you told it too eloquently. I could see the poor old man! And has he—Maurice, did you say!—never been heard of?"

"Never," said Chudleigh, curtly, anxious to get away from the subject. "Now let me take you to see the church. No, stay, that is too dis-

mal after this. We will walk round the village home and finish the lions another day."

#### CHAPTER IV.

Nothing is better, I will think,  
Than love; the hidden well-water  
Is not so delicate to drink.

*Seaburne.*

Oh, great one, some men love and are ashamed;  
Some men are weary of the bonds of love;  
Yea, and by some men lightly art thou blamed,  
That from thy tolls their life they cannot move,  
And 'mid the ranks of men their manhood prove.

Think then will it bring honour to thy head  
If folk say "Everything aside he cast,  
And to all fame and honour was he dead"?  
*Atlanta's Prayer to Venus.*

A WEEK passed, rapidly as it seemed to the inmates of the Hall, for to Sir Fielding there were seven days less of the short grace afforded him to meet the large sum required at the end of Spring.

To his son, Chudleigh, the days had flown by with the speed happiness always lends time, for he was happy—happy with a strange inward joy, the source of which he could not discern, although he had only to search his own heart to unearth it immediately. So happy was he in those short December days, notwithstanding the cloud which hung over his fortunes, that he longed for them to last for ever.

As for Maud, rejoicing with all her heart in the acquisition of her new friend, she was more prodigal of her rippling laughter and sunny smiles than ever, and flitted through the old house with her arm wound round the waist of the beautiful Carlotta like a flash of sunlight leading the moon captive.

And Carlotta, whether she was happier than usual her face and manner did not chronicle. Always speaking in the soft-toned musical voice, always ready to exchange serene, loving glances with Maud, or a quiet smile for some pleasantry of Chudleigh's, she looked as if she were too used to change, pleasant or otherwise, to be affected by the sudden gleam of peace and prosperity thrown across her path. Only to Sir Fielding did her serenely calm bearing ever vary; to him her manner was inexpressibly soft and tender. Her attention was absorbed immediately by him if he spoke to her, she would listen to his rambling, old lore talk with her dark eyes fixed on his face, wearing an expression which Chudleigh would have given a world had he possessed it to find in them when she looked his way. For, try as he would to ignore the fact, Chudleigh's heart was slipping away from him fast, his knees were bending to the dark, queen-like form with the adoration of love.

He struggled against it manfully, for he read no encouragement in Carlotta's eyes, but the strange thrill at her chance touch, and the buoyant feeling of happiness in her presence, and the joyous echo of his heart to her low musical laugh, grew hour by hour.

During the week Chudleigh had fulfilled his promise and finished the lions for Carlotta, but after that first day when he told the story of the Rectory they were always accompanied by Maud.

Fond as he was of his sister he could have spared her presence in these winter walks and gulloes, but some chance word of Carlotta always brought Maud with them, and Chudleigh's sensitiveness, quickened by the sharp point of Cupid's dart, perceived that Carlotta purposely planned against another *tête-à-tête* with him, and for a little time the idea gave a certain reserve and coldness to his manner, but the ice melted beneath the calm serenity of Carlotta's smile, and before three days had passed he was as much in bondage as ever.

Once or twice in the course of conversation Carlotta let fall some incident or other of her strange life; but it was only when off her guard as it seemed, and each flash of confidence was followed by a tightening of the lip and a sudden marked reserve which only served to deepen the mystery in which her life seemed wrapped.

On the eighth day of their sojourn at the Hall Chudleigh walked into the drawing-room where

Lady Mildred, Carlotta and Maud were sitting, and, passing up to her ladyship's armchair beside the fire, said,—

"I have just seen Chaffer, the decorator. He tells me the cottage is quite finished."

"Eh?" said Lady Mildred, waking from a pleasant dream of a game at whist she was playing with a good hand and half-crown points. "What do you say, my dear Chud? The cottage finished? Carlotta, do you hear? We must think of packing."

Chudleigh tried to laugh with polite indifference, but there was an eagerness in his voice he could not hide.

"Packing!—nonsense, aunt! That the cottage is finished is no reason why you should fly from the Hall like a caged pigeon suddenly released. Besides, I could not think of allowing you to go for another"—week, he was going to say, but in for a penny in for a pound—"month—"

"Nonsense, Chud!" interrupted Lady Mildred, "another month. Long enough to dry a cathedral. Besides, the cottage has only been white-washed and repapered or something of that sort, has it not?"

"Oh, lots of things; it's very damp, indeed, very damp," said Chudleigh, earnestly. "You mustn't think of going for some weeks at least."

"Ah, but I want to get settled, Chud. Think how long I have been away, gadding about. Have some fires lit all over the house, and—and do anything of that sort you can think of, Chud, there is a dear boy, so that we may get into our little nest—Carlotta and I—in three or four days."

"You are in a great hurry to leave the Hall, aunt," said Chudleigh, with a slight frown then, walking over to where Maud and Carlotta sat leaning over some views of Italy, he added, "I hope Miss Lawley is not so anxious to fly from us—at least, she will not declare her eagerness so openly."

She looked up with a smile at his anxious yet smiling face.

"You know I am not," she said. "I should be very sorry to go, but that we shall not be far away you know. We can see the north turret from the cottage."

"Oh, you must not go yet," broke in Maud, eagerly. "What should I do without you? and what would papa? If you go there will be no one to talk to him about his authors, or find quotations in his books. Oh, aunt, you must not go. It will be so lonely when you are gone, will it not, Chud?"

Chud said nothing, perhaps he did not hear from where he stood beside the fire looking into the glowing coals.

"Say you will stay another fortnight," continued Maud, going over to her aunt and kissing her. "Be a good auntie, and let me have Carlotta a little longer."

"Carlotta can stay, my dear, if she likes," said Lady Mildred, graciously.

Chudleigh looked up quickly.

"Will you stay?" he said, eagerly.

She shook her head.

"No, thank you very much. If Lady Mildred will let me I will accompany her," she said, almost coldly, after a minute's pause, lifting her eyes for one instant to his face. "No, I think I will go with Lady Mildred."

Chudleigh said nothing more. Perhaps the remembrance that he could see the cottage from the north turret at any time he liked to mount it was consolation enough to keep him silent.

In a week's time they had gone, and the Hall seemed strangely still and solemn without Lady Mildred's quick, cheerful chatter and Carlotta's low-toned voice.

Chudleigh had gone over with them in the carriage, and waiting barely long enough to receive his aunt's thanks for the way in which the cottage was decorated, and Carlotta's few quiet words in admiration of the drawing-room, returned to the Hall with a nameless void in his heart and a great feeling of ennui.

Maud was in her boudoir, and hearing him pass on his way to his own room, she called to him.

"Back already, Chud dear?" she said as he came behind her chair and stooped to kiss her.



I did not expect you back to dinner, and was thinking how lonely I should feel with only quiet papa and Simmons, the butler, to keep me company. Why didn't you stay, Chud?"

"Why didn't I?" said Chud. "Why should I? It is not likely they would ask me on the very first day of their taking possession. I should have been in the way—a nuisance."

"A dear old nuisance," breathed Maud, caressing his hand. "What do you think of Carlotta? Is she not beautiful, grandly beautiful?"

"Yes," said Chudleigh, staring at the fire.

"And so clever. She knows all about the old books and the new ones too, which papa is so fond of, and has travelled so very much. My poor geography does not go half so far as Carlotta has been. Yet, poor thing, while I envy her I cannot help pitying her at the same time, can you, Chud? She seems so unnaturally quiet, so solemnly calm, and her smile, though it is so beautiful, is so sorrowful and sad sometimes. Do you know, Chud, I think Carlotta has not found life very pleasant up to this time. She so seldom speaks of her father, never of herself, and seems to shun the past so carefully. Did you notice that, Chud?"

"Yes," said Chud again.

Maud looked up.

"Are you listening, brother mine? I don't believe you heard or understood a word of what I have been saying."

"Yes, I have, little one," said Chud. "I was thinking."

"What of?" said Maud. "Those horrible books and accounts the steward is always bothering you about, I suppose. Poor Chud, they are worrying you into wrinkles!"

She laughed sweetly as she stroked his strong hand with her tiny soft ones.

He had not been thinking of them, but her words brought them to his mind and deepened the shadow across his forehead.

What if he did love? No, no; it could not be. He was poor. He had his way to fight and could not drop his sword or unbuckle his armour to woo and wed a portionless girl, the daughter of a man whom the world called an adventurer, be she as queenly as Cleopatra and as beautiful as the first mother, Eve.

"We shall have a storm," he said, stretching his great limbs into an upright position. "How much longer are you going to toast your toes, miss? I must go and dress."

(To be continued.)

## AUNT BARBARA.

—:—:—

His friends always spoke of Edgar Gerrant as a man who had sacrificed himself for his family, and he had admitted to his intimates that when his mother died, leaving him the eldest of four children, he had solemnly promised her that he would always be to them father, mother, brother and friend.

Some of the more inquisitive—but they never asked the question the second time—had been curious enough to enquire why he set such a particular store on the little opal ring that he wore suspended from the fob-chain of his watch.

He certainly did value it as the most precious of his earthly possessions, and these were considerable, for knowing ones said he had retired from business at the age of thirty-seven, worth a hundred thousand pounds.

The intrinsic value of the ring was perhaps five pounds. The secret connected with it he kept safely and securely locked in his heart.

The night his sister Lil, the baby of the family, was married—the other two had passed from his protection some time before—Edgar, without a single regret for what he had given up for their sakes, kissed the radiantly-blushing bride, and retiring to his own chamber, sat thinking far into the night, with the little opal ring before him.

From time to time he glanced above the mantel-piece at the framed photograph of a sweet, girlish

face, that seemed to look down upon him with pleading reproach in the eyes, and a sigh would escape him.

"Poor Bab!" he murmured, at last. "I am sure she loved me, and I am equally sure that I shall never love any other woman. I was poor then, and her father was rich. I read of his failure—a total amash, it was—ten years ago. They forced her to give me up, but I have always kept the little opal ring that she put upon my finger and asked me to wear, and I have never ceased to think of her. She must be long since married. Ah, me!"

He sighed again, and walking to the mantel-piece turned the pictured face to the wall.

"I must try to forget her," he said, aloud, "and if I do not see her face, it will help me, perhaps. She is another's wife, and I have no right."

The next day he returned to his business, his old, serene, practical self, and from thence on worked so hard and faithfully that, at the end of three years, he called his partners together and announced to them that he would retire from active participation in the business after the first of the year, but would allow his capital to still remain in the firm as a special fund.

So, whilst yet a young man, he laid down the active cares of life, and with an income that his quiet tastes precluded all possibility of spending, left the pursuit of wealth to other and more worldly-ambitious men.

He took a suite of apartments at Mrs. Bronson's fashionable boarding-house, bought a saddle horse and joined a club.

At the latter place he always turned up at exactly four o'clock every afternoon and after dinner, either went to the theatre or buried himself in a book in one of the recesses of the club's library.

Sometimes he indulged in a game of billiards, and occasionally took a hand in a rubber of whist.

At precisely half-past eight o'clock, except on theatre nights, he entered the broad doorway of Mrs. Bronson's mansion.

Edgar was a very fine-looking man; his wealth and social position was a bait that caused many fair damsels to tempt him with their wiles and smiles.

He was coldly indifferent to their blandishments, however, and one day told his most particular club associate in confidence, that he should never marry. He gave no reasons for this; the reason lay in that sweet, girlish face that he kept turned to the wall.

One evening when he returned to his apartments at Mrs. Bronson's, he was met in the hall by that lady herself.

She was very tall and very dignified, and always wore a black silk dress that rustled, as Edgar once humorously put it, "like dead leaves tumbling over the cobbles in a high wind."

"Mr. Gerrant," she began, in her loftiest and most dignified tone.

"Madam!" he said halting at the hat-rack.

"A boy—a very small and very dirty boy, at least he impressed me as being a very small and dirty boy—called to see you this afternoon."

"A boy—small—dirty—called to see me this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"What—what did the young vagabond want, Mrs. Bronson?"

"I hardly think he could be termed a vagabond," went on Mrs. Bronson, in her precise way. "Vagabond implies something dishonourable, and this boy was certainly honest."

"Eh?" stammered Edgar, very much confused. "I'm sure I beg your pardon—or the boy's pardon—or the honest vag—that is—What did he want?"

This explosion did not in the least ruffle the serenity of Mrs. Bronson's precise and stately manner.

"Mr. Gerrant," she said, and each word fell as clearly cut from her thin lips as a diamond from the hands of the lapidary, "have you lost anything?"

"Lost anything?"

Edgar stared at her in dumb surprise, and fingered his watch-fob nervously.

"Gracious!" he suddenly exclaimed. "The ring!"

"A ring?" repeated Mr. Bronson still precisely.

"You have lost a ring?"

"Yes! A ring that I prized highly—that no money could buy—a—a—"

His voice trembled and broke, for in fancy, as he grasped the place where the ring ought to be, he saw rising up before him the appealing eyes of the sweet girl-face which he had turned to the wall.

Mrs. Bronson's precise voice recalled him to his senses.

"Can you describe the ring, Mr. Gerrant?" she demanded.

"Describe it? Why, of course," he answered. "I wore it on my watch-chain here, it being too small for my finger. It was an opal, set in a true lover's knot. The gold—I've carried it for twenty years—was very much worn; quite thin on the under side."

"Exactly," said Mrs. Bronson. "This is evidently your property."

As she finished speaking she extended her stately arm and from her long, white fingers there dropped into his extended palm the little ring.

It had been worn so thin that it had broken in twain and dropped from his fob-chain.

"Thank you, thank you," Edgar cried. "What—ah—what reward? Don't be afraid to name a high figure. I'll pay it willingly."

As an earnest of his liberal intentions, he jingled the loose silver in his pockets and fumbled at a roll of notes.

"I mentioned the question of reward to the boy, who was certainly very small, but may not have been dirty—" began Mrs. Bronson.

"Oh, I see," interrupted Edgar, a new light sweeping across his handsome face, "the boy found the ring—returned it; but how the deuce—beg your pardon, ma'am,—did he know it was mine?"

"I asked him that question myself," explained the landlady, "and I think I can quote my exact words. 'Boy,' said I, 'how do you know that this is Mr. Edgar Gerrant's ring?'"

"And what did he say?" cried Edgar eagerly.

"I will quote his exact words," answered the imperturbable Mrs. Bronson—"quote them exactly—and I must say they seemed very extraordinary to me at the time."

"Well, quote 'em!" broke in Edgar, who was in a fever of curiosity and excitement.

"Sir!" was Mrs. Bronson's retort.

And she drew her tall form up to its loftiest and most imposing height.

"I didn't mean that exactly," stammered Edgar, apologetically. "But I am very anxious to find this boy—to learn his address—so that I may reward him."

"I know nothing of this boy, neither can I tell you anything of his abiding place," said Mrs. Bronson, with cutting sarcasm. "But, possibly,—and her voice grew more icy—"you may be able to identify him through his Aunt Barbara!"

"His Aunt Barbara?" cried Edgar. And his face grew suddenly white and as suddenly flushed red. "I must find him at all hazards."

He rammed his hat down upon his head, and straightway rushed from the house, much to the dignified and precise Mrs. Bronson's disgust and amazement.

He still clutched the opal ring in his hand, and happening to pass a jeweller's, as he rushed aimlessly along the streets, whither he knew not, he suddenly halted, and retracing his steps entered the establishment, with the idea of leaving the ring to be mended and fastened to the chain again.

The proprietor was busy with a customer—a lady dressed in black, who was accompanied by a boy in knickerbockers.

Edgar leaned against a show case, waiting until the jeweller should be disengaged.

He drummed nervously with the recovered ring on the edge of the counter, and so clumsy was he that it slipped from his fingers and rolled across the floor.

The sharp eyes of the boy in knickerbockers

followed the ring on its journey, and he ran across the floor and captured it.

An exclamation of wonder escaped him, and holding it up, he cried:

"See, Aunt Barbara! This is the little ring that I found in the street to-day while we were out walking. This gentleman," and he looked towards Edgar, "must be Mr. Gerrant, whom you said you used to know when you were a girl."

At the boy's words the lady turned her head, and Edgar stood face to face with the mature original of the girl whose picture he had turned to the wall.

"Bab!" he cried, and took a step towards her.

"Edgar!" was the low response; and she dropped her eyes and blushed rosily.

"I—I—" he stammered, with a glance at her mourning gown. "Are you a widow?"

"I have never married, Edgar," she said, in a voice so low that not even the sharp-eared boy heard it. "I recognised the ring at once, and we found your address in the directory."

"Yes," he said with boyish eagerness, "I have always kept the ring—worn it on my watchchain for twenty years—and your picture hangs in my room. I've never married, either, Bab, because I couldn't forget—"

"I will call to-morrow, sir, in reference to the brooch," she interrupted, turning towards the jeweller.

Then she stepped up beside Edgar and whispered:

"My brother-in-law, whose little son found the opal while we were out walking to-day, lives not far from here. My sister Mabel is dead, and I look after her four motherless children."

She took his arm and they left the shop.

Edgar did not come back to his boarding-house until midnight.

His first act on entering his room was to turn to the light the picture of the girlish face.

For some time he gazed upon the sweet features lovingly, and then, mounting a chair, kissed them again and again, blushing furiously at his boldness.

His acquaintances were very much astonished, a few days later, when a city paper published an announcement of the approaching marriage of "our esteemed fellow-citizen, Edgar Gerrant Esq., to Miss Barbara Lincoln, eldest daughter of the late James Lincoln, Esq."

It was remarked as very strange, and an augury of evil fortune, that when the marriage was solemnized, the groom placed an opal ring upon the bride's finger.

"You don't believe it will bring us bad luck, do you, darling?" asked Edgar, as they were whirling in the carriage to the railroad station.

"No!" she answered. "It has brought me the best of fortune."

"It was my lucky talisman, for it found me you," said Edgar.

And then he kissed her.

ANYONE who has noticed a snail feeding on a leaf must have wondered how such a soft, flabby, slimy animal can make such a sharp and clean-cut incision in the leaf, leaving an edge as smooth and straight as if it had been cut with a knife. That is due to the peculiar and formidable mouth he has. The snail eats with his tongue and the roof of his mouth. The tongue is a ribbon which the snail keeps in a coil in his mouth. This tongue is in reality a band-saw, with the teeth on the surface instead of on the edge. The teeth are so small that as many as thirty-thousand of them have been found on one snail's tongue. They are exceedingly sharp and only a few of them are used at a time. Not exactly only a few of them, but a few of them comparatively, for the snail will probably have four thousand or five thousand in use at once. He does this by means of his coiled tongue. He can uncoil as much of this as he chooses, and the uncoiled part he brings into service. The roof of his mouth is as hard as bone. He grasps the leaf between his tongue and that hard substance and, rasping away with his tongue, saws through the toughest leaf with ease, always leaving the edge very smooth and straight.

## FACETIÆ.

WILTON: "She is a passing fair." Annette (a rival): "I should say she was past."

"SMITH, the editor, rejected my jokes." "Smith is no respecter of age."

NOT: "What makes Grimes shaped so like a corkscrew?" DOT: "His wife's constant twisting him round her little finger."

CUSTOMER (in book store): "I would like to get some good book on Faith." Clerk: "Sorry, sir, but our rule is to sell nothing to strangers except for cash."

KATE: "No, Hattie does not attend any church; she says she is her own religion." Harry: "That is a religion that I should like to embrace."

FIRST GIRL (in Switzerland): "Isn't that a lovely sunset?" Second Girl: "Yes; pretty good. But you should see some that my brother Henry paints."

VERY unfortunate: "It's pretty tough to own only one suit of clothes," said Hicks. "Suppose some one steals it. Why, you have absolutely no re-dress."

"You see that good-looking girl over there? Well, I could have married her long ago." "And why didn't you?" "Because she wouldn't have me."

GUEST (after struggling valiantly but unavailingly some time with a fowl): Waiter, what kind of a bird is this? "Canvasback duck, sir." "No wonder I couldn't do anything with it. Run and get me the scissors."

MAMMA: "If you eat any more of that padding, Tommy, you'll see the bogie man to-night." Tommy (after a moment's thought): "Well, give us some more. I might as well settle my mind about the truth of that story once for all."

MISTRESS: "Mary, do you think the work is too hard for you here?" Mary: "No, ma'am." Mistress: "Then why are you leaving?" Mary: "It's the style of hats you buy, ma'am; I don't look well in none of 'em."

He: "This is a stupid play, and what a dull audience!" She: "They need stirring up." I wish I had worn my big hat." He: "I wish you had. Then I could at least have got into a row with the man behind me."

"Don't you think there is always some (puff) risk in riding (puff) in a smoking car?" "I do, sir. There is no telling (puff) when the man sitting next to you may light a cigarette." Moves three seats forward.

"Ah," said the enraptured young man, as he drew the shapely head with its golden hair close to his heart. "Do you hear it throb, darling?" "Y-yes, Harold." "What does it seem to say?" he whispered. The dear girl listened a moment, and answered, softly, "It says, 'tick, tick, tick, tick, Harold.'"

At a small town in the North of Scotland an old railway guard was recently appointed as a sidesman of the parish church. On the first Sunday that he commenced his new duties he took the collection bag, and, proceeding to the aisle from which he was to collect, he suddenly startled the congregation with the cry of "All tickets, please!"

SHE is just a bit superstitious in a delightful, feminine way. When her husband spoke of a dream he had had, she said, earnestly, "Harold, dear, I'm sure you are going to hear some bad news soon." "I am sure of it, too," he answered. "I thought you didn't believe in signs!" "I don't. But I had made up my mind to go down town this morning and ask what the price of coal was."

MRS. PARTRICIAN (to new servant): "I suppose, Bridget, you overheard my husband and me conversing rather earnestly this morning?" Bridget: "Indade I did that, mum." Mrs. P.: "I hope you did not consider that anything unusual was going on?" Bridget: "Never a bit, mum. I wunst had a husband meself, mum, and there never a day passed that the neighbours didn't believe one or the other of us would be killed."

AN Irish earl and his lady were riding out one morning, and meeting one of their tenantry, gave her a kindly greeting. "And sure I had a drame about yer honour last night sending me a pound of tobacco, and yer leddyship a pound of tay; and its joyful I am to tell ye, this morning," said the accustomed beneficiary. "But, my good woman," replied the earl, "dreams go by the contrary." "Indade, then, yer honour is to send the tay and her leddyship the tobacco," was the quick-witted reply.

A CASE was tried in one of our Northern towns, in which a man claimed damages against a mining company for obstructing a stream with their refuse. A witness stated that he saw a stick in the stream covered with refuse, which obstructed and fouled the water. Judge: "How large was the stick?" Witness: "I really couldn't say, as I didn't measure." Judge: "Was it as thick as my arm?" Witness: "Well, rather thicker perhaps; I should judge it to have been about as thick as your head."

His father is a physician in a Northern town and one day when the doctor was out he and a little playmate were "playing doctor" in the real doctor's office. Presently he threw open a cupboard door and revealed an articulated skeleton to the terrified gaze of his playmate, but he himself was perfectly calm. "Pooh," he said to his playmate, "what are you afraid of? It's nothing but an old skellington!" "Wh—wh—where did it come from?" asked the other lad, with chattering teeth. "Oh, I don't know. Papa has had it a long time; I expect it's most likely it was his first patient."

NOR many Sundays since a young man, having returned for a short holiday to his native village in Devon, visited the Sunday-school in which he had once been taught. The superintendent asked him if he would like to speak to the children, and, being in nowise modest and retiring, he at once fell in with the suggestion. "A young man," said he, "is like a ship on the ocean—as long as the ship is sound, and no water leaks in, she rides triumphant. So with a young man. He may be where there is wickedness; but if he keeps it from leaking in, if he keeps tight—that is—he—if he's always tight—and—!" And then the poor fellow realized that he could never make it right, and so, with all his conceit completely gone, he sat down and feebly mopped his crimson and perspiring face.

"You are very late this morning, Mr. Baldwin," said a dry goods merchant recently to one of his clerks. "Do not let it happen again." "Very sorry," said the clerk, "I met with a serious fall." "Indeed," replied the merchant, relenting. "Are you hurt much?" "Principally, sir, in your estimation," answered the clerk, respectfully. "Oh, never mind that," said the merchant, kindly. "I am very sorry, and had no intent to be severe. We are all liable to accidents. How did you get the fall?" "Well, you see, sir," said the clerk, confidently, "I was called quite early this morning—earlier, in fact, than usual." "Ah!" "Yes, sir; but somehow or other I fell asleep again." "Go to your desk, sir, and don't try that on again," exclaimed the merchant with an air of severity which was belied by the twinkle in his eye, which denoted that he enjoyed the joke.

NON-STIPENDIARY magistrates in many small towns have but vague notions of law, and often arrive at strange decisions. In many cases, however, the clerk, who is of course a solicitor, manages to keep them right. A short time back a man was brought up at our local court, charged with some trivial offence. It was the presiding magistrate's first time of occupying the bench. He evidently felt proud of the dignity, and had been refreshing his mind with the speeches of some of the judges of the Supreme Courts. "Prisoner at the bar," he began, when the evidence was concluded. "You have committed a heinous crime, and the sentence—" The clerk here whispered: "An alibi has been clearly proved!" "Yes," continued the worthy, "and a nalliby has been clearly proved! which makes it more heinouser." Here there was another hurried consultation with the clerk, at the end of which the magistrate concluded his sentence: "but as this is your first offence, I'll let you off."



## SOCIETY.

THE fashion of wearing a piece of velvet round the throat is a popular one this season.

THE State Apartments at Windsor Castle will be re-opened to the public on Boxing Day, if the Queen carries out her present intention of going to Osborne on December 19th.

FROM a very early age, the women of Paraguay all smoke big cigars, and the natural result is that their teeth are blackened very soon by the nicotine, and their breath is far from savoury.

THE Duke of York has consented to become a vice-president, and the Duchess of York a patroness of the Surrey Convalescent Home, Seaford, Sussex.

THE Duchess of York is delighted to have the Duchess of Fife's two little maids close at hand, for she is a great favourite with tiny Lady Alexandra Duff, and has acted as *locum tenens* for the Duchess of Fife's head nurse on many occasions of late.

EVERY crowned head of Europe, with the exception of that of Turkey is descended from one of two sisters, the daughters of Duke Ludwig Rudolph of Brunswick-Wolfenbützel, who lived about one hundred and fifty years ago.

THE Empress Frederick will be detained in Germany until the end of January by family affairs. The Empress will probably spend February with the Queen at Osborne and at Windsor Castle, and she will then go to Italy, to pass the spring at Rome and at Naples.

PRINCESS LOUIS OF BATTENBERG and her children are to stay during the winter at one of the Queen's houses on the Osborne domain, which place will, no doubt, become their permanent residence when Prince Louis obtains the command of the *Victoria and Albert*.

THE office of Master of the Ceremonies, which is in the gift of the Queen, and worth about £700 a year was founded by James I. The Master when he goes to Court, wears a gold chain over his shoulders, from which is suspended a badge of office which has two sides, the one representing Peace and the other War, and it is turned accordingly. The Master of the Ceremonies is in attendance on the Queen whenever she officially receives any member of the Corps Diplomatique, and he is on duty at Drawing Rooms, Levées, State balls and concerts, and any other functions at which the Ambassadors or foreign ministers are present.

ON Lord Mayor's Day the Prince of Wales was fifty-two years old. There are not many living now who were attached to the Court at the time of the Prince's birth. Three weeks after the Queen's confinement, Her Majesty created her son Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester, and her Royal letters patent said, "And him our said and most dear son, the Prince of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, as has been accustomed, we do ennoble and invest with the said Principality and Earldom, by girding him with a sword, by putting a coronet on his head and a gold ring on his finger; and also by delivering a gold rod into his hand that he may preside there and direct and defend those parts."

THE little Crown Prince of Germany, the eleven-year-old son of the Kaiser, is sadly deficient in childish, and especially boyish, characteristics. He would contrast very unfavourably with the Duke of Connaught's English trained boy, or even with his smaller cousins the small Duke of Albany and Prince Alexander of Battenberg. The Queen and her sons and daughters have all brought up their children in the plainest and most sensible fashion. The Crown Prince talks and conducts himself as if he were twenty instead of half that age, and interests himself only in military matters and German history. The Empress of Germany was delighted with the nursery arrangements of her Royal English relatives when she was here, and begged the Queen to use her influence with the Kaiser to relax his military system in the Potsdam nursery.

## STATISTICS.

THE income of Oxford University is slightly under £70,000 per annum.

TEN MILLION pounds' worth of property is yearly lost by fire in England.

THERE are in the Zoological Gardens over 2,400 birds, beasts, and reptiles of all sizes. It costs nearly £4,000 a year to feed them. The larger animals and wild sheep last year consumed 105 loads of clover, 153 loads of meadow hay, 130 quarters of wheat, 340 quarters of bran. The larger carnivora—as lions, tigers, hyenas, wolves—were fed on 230 horses and 152 goats. The seals, otters, sea-lions, some fish-eating birds, and even the polar bears, are fed partly or entirely on fish.

## GEMS.

HE is a wise man who makes to-morrow from to-day.

IT is good to know right principles, but better still to love them.

A SECRET is like silence; you cannot talk about it and keep it. It is like money; when once you know there is any concealed it is half discovered.

A WISE and good man will turn examples of all sorts to his advantage. The good he will make his patterns, and strive to equal or excel them. The bad he will by all means avoid.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

DEVILLED BISCUITS.—Butter some water biscuits generously on both sides, and dust them with pepper; rub a slice of good cheese to a smooth paste with a little made mustard and cover one side of each biscuit with this mixture. Grill them over a clear fire.

QUINCE CHEESE.—Take equal parts of quince pulp and white sugar. Boil until the jam is stiff and smooth, and pour out on to shallow dishes, one-half inch in depth. Dry in a cool oven, cut the jam into fancy shapes, and store in a tin box.

CREAM MUFFINS.—One pint of flour, one-half teaspoonful of salt, one half teaspoonful of soda, one teaspoonful of cream of tartar, yolk of two eggs, beaten lightly; three-fourths cup of cream, or enough to make a drop batter; whites of two eggs beaten stiff. Bake in muffin pans, and serve very hot.

MUSHROOM KETCHUP.—A basket of mushrooms. Pick them and wash them and sprinkle them over with salt for a few days; stir occasionally for two or three days; then squeeze out the juice, and to each quart add a half teaspoonful of cloves and mustard seed; allspice, black pepper, and ginger, three-quarters of a teaspoonful of each. Put the whole in a saucepan, and heat slowly to boiling point; then pour out and leave it for a fortnight. Strain through muslin and bottle for use. Should it show any appearance of spoiling, boil up once more with a little more spice and salt.

A FLAVOUR FOR CUSTARDS.—A caramel flavour is very easily made and is excellent for custards, ice-creams and puddings. Take two heaping tablespoonfuls of granulated sugar and one of water. Stir them over the fire in a sheetiron saucepan until they begin to turn brown, and when the mixture is thoroughly melted and has become a rich golden brown, which will be in two or three minutes, add the milk of the custard or ice-cream which it is desired to flavour, and stir the whole over the fire till the caramel has melted evenly into the milk. In the case of a sauce, add a syrup made with a cup of sugar and a cup of water, and well flavoured with a little cinnamon and a lemon peel, and stir until the whole is well mixed.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

EVERY Chinese village has a theatre.

ITALY does not produce enough food for home consumption, except wine and fruit.

JAPAN has fourteen railways projected, and will build them as rapidly as possible.

BEER was the universal drink of the English till the introduction of tea and coffee about 1650.

DIAMOND CUTTERS in Holland have succeeded in cutting stones so small that it takes 1,500 of them to weigh a carat.

IN Australia green corn, wheat or oats is habitually cut for hay, and is considered to be much more nutritive than hay made from grass.

SCIENTISTS allege that the remote ancestor of the horse was a diminutive quadruped but little larger than the rabbit.

SOME German jewellers have introduced a rather gruesome "charm" for the watch chain, in the form of a tiny receptacle for a portion of the ashes of dead and cremated friends.

IN the Shetland Isles there is a gull which defends the flock from eagles. It has therefore come to be regarded by the shepherds as a privileged bird.

A FORK with which to eat macaroni has been introduced. It has a broad blade with two prongs, but is hardly equal to landing the slippery stuff in the mouth without practice.

SARAWAKIAN ladies will-exercise every art of fascination, and every plea with their husbands and lovers, in order to get the heads of enemies brought home, there being an agreeable superstition that by this means alone dead relatives are "laid" and family mourning can be discarded.

THE smallest holes pierced by modern machinery are 1-1,000th of an inch in diameter. They are bored through sapphires, rubies, and diamonds by a machine which makes 22,000 revolutions a minute.

AMONG the natives of Burmah it is a belief that people born on a Monday are zealous; on Tuesday, honest; Wednesday, quick-tempered, but soon calm again; Thursday, mild; Friday, talkative; Saturday, hot-tempered and quarrelsome; while Sunday children will be parsimonious.

A PHYSICIAN who has made the subject a study, declares that the taint of heredity is to be found in most cases of nervous diseases. Persons who are broken down by dissipation, exhausting diseases, excessive brain work, or anxiety, can no more transmit vitality to their children than a decaying vine can beget healthy fruit.

EXTRAORDINARY stories are told of the healing properties of a new oil which is easily made from the yolk of hens' eggs. The eggs are first boiled hard, and the yolks are then removed, crushed, and placed over a fire, where they are carefully stirred until the substance is on the point of catching fire, when the oil separates and the oil may be poured off. One yolk will yield nearly two teaspoonfuls of oil. It is in general use among the colonists of South Russia as a means of curing cuts, bruises, &c.

CLOCKS are regarded as curiosities by the Hindoos, and for this reason half a dozen or more time pieces are often found in apartments of the wealthy Hindostanees. They are not used as timepieces, but simply for ornament, since the old-fashioned way of telling the hour of the day in India, by calculating the number of bamboo-lengths the surhas travelled above the horizon, is satisfactory to the natives. It is said that in the country police stations in India, where the European division of the hours is observed, time is measured by placing in a tub of water a copper pot in which a small hole has been bored. It is supposed that it will take one hour for the water to leak into the pot so as to fill it and sink it. When the policeman sees that the pot has disappeared, he strikes the hour on a bell-like gong. If he is smoking or dozing, the copper pot may have disappeared several minutes before he discovers the fact; but the hour is when he strikes the gong.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

KIRTON.—Very rarely, if at all.  
 ELEANOR.—Take them to a dealer.  
 BERTRAM.—All cathedral towns are cities.  
 GEOFFREY.—You must be guided by a lawyer.  
 STEFFAN.—It is caused by bad digestion.  
 REGGIE.—It is probably a rule of the society.  
 L. L.—Pigs must be so kept as not to be a nuisance.  
 DAVY.—You can offer yourself verbally or by letter.  
 W. W.—It can be registered in any name.  
 ALF.—Not unless he has been out of the kingdom.  
 NORMAN.—Put your affairs in the hands of a solicitor.  
 STINA.—Oil stains should be washed out in cold water.  
 SYN.—You had better see the lawyer who prepared the will.  
 SNOWDROP.—Go to a proper ophthalmic surgeon for examination.  
 FRANK.—Everything depends on the degree of your skill.  
 B. S. R.—You must see the School Board attendance officer.  
 EDITH.—Want of sufficient fresh air and exercise is your ailment.  
 GREGOR.—Any goods found upon the premises may be seized.  
 ROY.—The negative of a photograph belongs to the photographer.  
 G. D.—You should inquire of some of the asbestos manufacturers.  
 INQUIRER.—If the young man is under age the money cannot be recovered.  
 CONSTANT READER.—A license must be taken out for dogs more than six months old.  
 SUSAN.—Merely ordinary cleanliness by the use of soap and water is all you require.  
 NINA.—The rule is that it shall be provided by the parents of the bride.  
 HONOR.—Old married people have been allowed to live together in the workhouse.  
 T. B. C.—Cavalry fire from the saddle as a rule, but sometimes they dismount to fire.  
 SWEET WILLIAM.—Get as good a lens as you are able to pay for. This is the main point in the camera.  
 PATIENCE.—One of the secrets of success is to have them dry as soon as possible after wetting.  
 LEVITA.—The violet is conventionally the only flower that can be worn by a person in mourning.  
 DENE.—Unless you have friends out there, or some other inducement, we could not advise you to emigrate.  
 LOUISE.—You had better inquire of your bookseller. We are not acquainted with any work of the sort.  
 LAUREL.—The pulp of a lemon rubbed on the roots of the hair will stop ordinary cases of falling out.  
 A VERY OLD READER.—The lady in the case stated, has the privilege of extending the invitation in question.  
 ONE WHO WISHES TO KNOW.—The Prince of Wales is not an hereditary title; it is created by each successive sovereign.  
 FOWLER B.—Take the will to Somerset House, where you will receive full instructions and all necessary forms.  
 CARTER S.—Apply to the secretary of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, 3, Copthall Buildings, London, E.C.  
 UNHAPPY MARY.—The marriage is legal unless both persons concurred in giving false information in order to deceive.  
 POOR MAUD.—The finest tonics for bad nerves are plenty of fresh air and exercise, and temperate, regular habits.  
 HERMAN.—The police are controlled by the city authorities, but part of the expense is defrayed by the Government.  
 MATILDA.—If the furniture belongs to you, and the house is in your name, the furniture is not liable for your husband's debts.  
 LADDIE.—There is no tax on cockades, but it would be very unobvious to use the ornament unless entitled by social prescription.  
 HENRIETTA.—Oxalic acid, a teaspoonful diluted in a wineglassful of boiling water, will remove inkstains by applying it with a camel's hair pencil.  
 A. Y.—A person cannot insure the life of another without consent, and he must also have an interest in the other person to enable him to insure it.  
 GERALDINE.—Hair brushes should be washed as little as possible. To clean, they should be rubbed together in sawdust or bran, warmed.  
 FREDERICA.—Cutting frequently will usually make the hair coarser, and will often stimulate partially atrophied follicles into growing new hair.

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TOM TUCKER.—The great radical demonstration in Hyde Park, London, in favour of the abolition of the House of Lords, took place in 1884. One hundred thousand persons were present.

## THE CHILDREN'S LAND.

I know a land, a beautiful land,  
 Fairer than isles of the East,  
 Where the farthest hills are rainbow-spangled,  
 And mirth holds an endless feast;  
 Where tears are dried like the morning dew,  
 And joys are many and griefs are few;  
 Where the old each day grows glad and new,  
 And life rings clear as a bell;  
 Oh! the land where the chimneys speak sweet and true  
 Is the land where the children dwell!

There are beautiful lands where the rivers flow  
 Through valleys of ripened grain;  
 There are lands where armies of worshippers know  
 No God but the God of Gaius.  
 The chink of gold is the song they sing,  
 And all their life-time harvesting  
 Are the glittering joys that gold may bring,  
 In measures they buy and sell;  
 But the land where love is the coin and king  
 Is the land where the children dwell.

They romp in troops through this beautiful land  
 From morning till set of sun,  
 And the Drowsy Fairies have sweet dreams planned  
 When the little tasks are done.  
 Here are no strivings for power and place,  
 The last are first in the mimic race,  
 All hearts are trusted, all life is grace,  
 And Peace sings "All goes well."  
 For God walks daily with unveiled face  
 In the land where the children dwell.

J. J. R.

GERTRUDE.—Place about a teaspoonful of alum in the water you wash your hands in. Afterwards powder with rice powder, which you can procure of any chemist.

EMMA.—If we could tell you what would make "a head of hair curl natural" our fortune would be made. To curl straight hair you must use artificial means, paper or tongs.

CHARLOTTE.—The only thing to be done with the mackintosh is to sponge it over with slightly warm water. This will remove any stains. It would be unsafe to use soap or spirits for cleaning it.

DORCAS.—Lay it out on a table, rub it well with bran, made damp with warm water, use a piece of flannel for rubbing, and rub till it is quite dry, then taking a piece of book mullin, rub it well with dry bran.

EFFIE.—The saying "A Roland for an Oliver" is derived from the tradition of two Paladins of Charlemagne, whose exploits were so similar that it was impossible to credit one with any superiority over the other.

INQUIRING ONE.—It is not necessary for you to take any legal steps. You are fully entitled to call the child by your name, and if she habitually uses it, it will be her legal name. Names are merely a matter of custom and usage, not of law.

INQUIRITIVE READER.—It is among the Turks that bath-money, the name as pin money in England, forms an item in every marriage contract, the husband engaging to allow his wife a certain sum for bathing purposes. If it be withheld she has only to go before the cad, and turn her slipper upside down. If the complaint be not then redressed, it is a ground of divorce.

CARRIE.—Parents can forbid the banns of a daughter or son under twenty-one. A marriage between persons under age is lawful, but if a false declaration of age or of parents' consent is made, the person making it may be prosecuted, and may be punished as for perjury.

BARBARA.—Clean white or pink blotting paper on which there must be no ink marks, laid over the stain, and a warm iron passed over that; if the colour suffers sponge lightly with a little very weak solution of ammonia. It will require a good deal of care.

ANGELA.—The term is applied to a condition in which a person is influenced by concentration of the mental powers or by pressure on some portion of the nerves. But little is as yet known of it, and anyone who experiments in this direction should do so with the utmost care. Undoubtedly hypnotism would be classed as a science.

WANTS TO KNOW.—If a person were hanged for a murder of which it was subsequently proved that he was innocent, and the real culprit was afterwards, on unimpeachable evidence, found to have been guilty of the crime, he can legally be hanged for the offence, and it is no defence for him to show that another person has already atoned for that crime with his life.

A REGULAR READER.—The names for gipsies vary in different languages. In Poland they are called Zingani; in Italy, Zingari; in Spain, Gitanos; in France, Bohemians; in Germany, Zigeuner. The Persians, it is stated, apply to them a name meaning "Black Indians." Their most ancient name is that of Sindis, which is supposed to be connected with Sind, the native name for the Indus.

AMBITIOUS ONE.—It is extremely difficult and always unsatisfactory to learn a language without a teacher. It is practically impossible to get the correct pronunciation. Get some progressive German grammars, and have some one who speaks German correctly read the lessons over several times with you. In this way ear and eye both become familiar with the text, and it is much more easily learned. If you must pay for your lessons you will find it a good investment.

TRIXY.—The festival of Hallowe'en, or All Hallows' Eve, the evening preceding All Saints' Day, or All Hallows, seem to be a relic of pagan times in the character of its observances, which have no warrant in the church ceremonies of All Saints' Day. The superstition, apparently of Scottish origin, that on this night supernatural influences prevail, that spirits walk and the powers of evil are abroad, has given rise to many curious observances, in addition to the innocent games with which the occasion is celebrated. Nuts and apples are then in particular request, and Hallowe'en is known as Nutcrack Night in the North of England.

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